

ON THE VALUE OF RELATIONSHIPS

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Abstract

My dissertation provides an account of the nature, value, and reasons arising out of close personal relationships. I begin by providing an analysis of the attitude of close personal love, which I construe as a response to the beloved's system of values as expressed through the beloved's character. My account emphasizes certain ways in which human beings are imperfect, and suggests that we love people in part for these imperfections. Relationships grounded in this love have value for their participants because they are useful, they can transform the character of experiences, they facilitate self-understanding, and enhance individual agency. Because of their distinctive value, relationships give rise to particular classes of reasons for their participants—reasons to favor loved ones, increase the potential range of shared experiences, and take good care of oneself. Because their value is basic and in part impersonal, certain relationship-specific goods give rise to reasons for us all not only to respect existing relationships but also to take steps towards becoming better potential participants in relationships. Finally, I consider the implications of my work for the larger conversation in ethics concerning the potential for conflict between reasons of partiality and those of impartiality. I consider several influential attempts to address this problem of conflict, but argue that each fails in its own way. I conclude that the value of relationships is such that it recommends partiality but also very likely serves impartial concerns. Relationships have a distinctive, genuine, and deep practical importance that is perhaps more in harmony with morality than may be obvious, but that nevertheless is liable to come into conflict with morality for deep, structural reasons.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1 – AN ANALYSIS OF CLOSE PERSONAL LOVE	8
Section 1 – Desiderata	10
Section 2 – Love as “Really Seeing” a Deeper Something	14
Section 3 – Love as Endorsement of a System of Values	23
Section 4 – Love as Separable from Relationships	33
Section 5 – Character, Imperfection, and the Substitution Problem	44
Conclusion	56
CHAPTER 2 – THE VALUE AND REASONS OF CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS FOR THEIR PARTICIPANTS	58
Section 1 – Value, Reasons, and the Relation Between Them	61
Section 2 – The Value of Close Personal Relationships	67
Section 3 – The Reasons Relationships Generate for Their Participants	81
Conclusion	88
CHAPTER 3 – THE IMPERSONAL VALUE AND PARTICIPANT -NEUTRAL REASONS OF RELATIONSHIPS	90
Section 1 – Relationships as Impersonally Valuable	95
1.1. Imperfectly Systematic Value Systems	97
1.2. Less Than Perfect Values	98
1.3. Imperfectly Expressing Our Values	104
First Conclusion – The Basic, Versatile, and Therefore Impersonal Value of Relationships	108
Section 2 – Reasons to Engage with Relationship-Specific Goods	113
2.1. Reasons to Take Care of One’s Capacity for Reciprocity	116

2.2.	Reasons to Cultivate New Interests	119
	Conclusion	125
	CHAPTER 4 – RELATIONSHIPS AND THE BIGGER PICTURE: PARTIALITY AND IMPARTIALITY IN PRACTICAL REASON	127
	Section 1 – The Moral Flavor of Some Relationship-Generated Reasons	129
	Section 2 – The Conflict Between Impartial Morality and Some Relationship- Generated Reasons	134
2.1.	Non-Moral Motives Within a Moral System	137
2.2.	Relationships as Bearers of Moral Value	144
2.2.1.	<i>Velleman’s Account of Love</i>	144
2.2.2.	<i>An African Ethical Approach</i>	148
2.3.	Downplaying the Importance of Morality	161
	Section 3 – The Difficulty of Separating Impartial and Partial Reasons	166
foo	Conclusion	174
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	177
	CURRICULUM VITAE	182

INTRODUCTION

For many of us, close relationships—like friendship and romantic partnership—are among the most valued parts of our lives. Our friendships help structure our day-to-day lives, and relationships are often among the most important factors influencing major life decisions, such as where to live and whether to have children. Our friends and loved ones are where we turn for solace when personal tragedies strike, and it is with them that we celebrate our happiest moments. The role of these close relationships is not always positive; our friends and loved ones can be sources of the worst emotional pain if we lose them, or in cases of disagreement and conflict. But the absence of such relationships is often keenly felt as a profound sort of loneliness that is not easily remedied. In this dissertation, I explore the value of these relationships, and the way that they give rise to reasons. I build an account that ascribes to close personal relationships a value that is distinctive and significant. My account pays particular attention to certain ways in which human beings are imperfect, and explains how relationships—and the love that grounds them—respond to human imperfections. I argue that we love people in part *for* their imperfections, not merely in spite of them. Further, relationships can be good for us in part because of our imperfections.

While some of the claims I make in the chapters that follow apply to various types of relationships, including familial ones and those between colleagues, for example, my intended focus is only what I call *close personal relationships*. The paradigmatic examples of close personal relationships are life partnerships and close long-term friendships between adults. I focus on these relationships because they have certain interesting features that I think set them apart from other kinds (such as familial relationships). First, they are typically *voluntary* in a way that other relationships are not; to some extent at least, we choose who will be our friends and partners. Second, they are typically understood to be relationships between *peers* or *equals* in a way that many other relationships are not. Families, workplaces,

and other organizations or structures within which relationships are formed often impose particular hierarchies or power structures that will have an impact on the relationships formed within them. I am more interested in relationships between (more-or-less) equals, which are entered into (more-or-less) freely. Finally, I have chosen to focus on these sorts of relationships because they seem to be of a rather special importance in our lives—consider their ubiquity as a theme in art and popular culture—but also relatively under-explored in ethics, at least in a systematic way.

Relationships are acknowledged and taken into consideration in ethical theory, especially in the last four decades following the attention drawn to them by critics of modern moral philosophy such as Bernard Williams. But they are typically treated together with other kinds of relationships at least, and often also together with personal interests and projects in general. There are more thorough treatments of particular kinds of relationship to be found in the work of the ancients—notably Plato and Aristotle—but among the problems with those accounts is the fact that our world, our societies, and our ideals have changed a good deal since they were written. A new comprehensive account of the ways that close personal relationships in particular have significance in our lives will be helpful, I believe, in answering more particular questions that may arise, such as whether they can ever legitimately take precedence over impartial values when the two values clash. Building and defending such a comprehensive account is my goal in the chapters that follow.

I begin with an analysis of the sort of love that forms the basis of close personal relationships. Working up to my account via critiques of the influential views of J. David Velleman, Harry Frankfurt, and Niko Kolodny, I construe the attitude of close personal love as an attitude of endorsement toward the *value system* of a loved one, as expressed through

the loved one's *character*. A person's character, on my view, is a uniquely identifying, unifying structure that underlies a person's behavioral tendencies and dispositions, and is informed by the person's attitudes toward things as being valuable. I draw attention to three ways in which human value systems are *imperfect*: These systems are imperfectly systematic, they have imperfect elements, and they are often imperfectly manifested in the person's character. When we appreciate certain imperfections in others, we recognize something that is similar to features of ourselves, and this enables trust. Recognizing that a loved one has a system of values that is imperfectly expressed in her character reminds one of one's own comparable imperfection. This sort of honest awareness of the other is one of the features that distinguishes mature love from *infatuation*, which I characterize as a sort of blindness to imperfection. Warranted trust is what distinguishes reasonable from unreasonable risk in the emotional vulnerability of love. This means that we do and should love people in part for their imperfections.

In my second chapter, I offer an explanation of why relationships grounded on close personal love are so important to us. The love that characterizes close friendships and romantic relationships often seems to be a genuine reason for certain actions and attitudes. The question of why this is the case would seem to be especially pressing for my account, since I construe love as a response to something that is *imperfect*, and that is recognized as such. I proceed on the assumption that what is of value should be valued as the valuable thing it is (following Joseph Raz). I argue that the value of relationships admits of the following fourfold classification: relationships are useful, they have a transformative capacity over the pleasure or displeasure of experiences, they can enhance an individual's understanding of her own value system, and they enhance our individual agency. I use this analysis to defend the view that relationships give rise to reasons to favor loved ones in cases

of need, to favor loved ones in the absence of any particular need, to increase the range of potential shared pleasures, and to take care of oneself. In each case, the reason is generated by some combination of the types of value in my fourfold classification.

In my third chapter, I turn from personal value and participant-relative reasons to the reasons relationships generate more generally. Do relationships bear value for, and generate reasons for, even non-participants? I argue both that existing relationships are valuable in such a way as to require respect from non-participants, and that relationship-specific goods give rise to general reasons for people to take steps toward becoming better potential participants in relationships. A major claim of my third chapter is that close personal relationships are distinctively valuable because they are uniquely suited to facilitate development of character. Having one's character in good shape is a *basic* good for human beings, no matter what particular preferences, values, or projects they may have. It is in this way that close personal relationships bear value that is *general* or *impersonal* in a way that someone's project of climbing Mount Kilimanjaro might not be. (The example is Thomas Nagel's.) That the value of relationships is in part *impersonal* extends their practical significance beyond the participant-relative significance explained in Chapter 2.

Finally, in my fourth chapter, I turn to the possibility of conflict between close personal relationships and morality. I suggest that the reasons arising from the value of relationships that apply *generally* (i.e., those treated in Chapter 3) are not in conflict with morality in principle. In fact, they turn out to be reasons to develop one's virtue in most cases. There is a more serious problem concerning the *participant-relative* reasons (i.e., those treated in Chapter 2), and as I see it, there is no satisfying solution to this problem. I consider strategies for dealing with the problem, exemplified by Peter Railton, David

Velleman, and Susan Wolf respectively, and argue that each falls short of solving the problem in its own way. I also examine an African ethical theory, sometimes called *Ubuntu*, according to which morality arises out of human relationships, but argue that such a theory likely faces similar problems when it comes to close, selective, loving relationships. I argue that the *basic* value of relationships depends on the *very features* of them that make them problematic when held up to the standard of impartial morality. I conclude that there is a deep, structural tension between the value of relationships and the concept of impartial morality, which explains the absence of a satisfying solution to the apparent conflict between these two kinds of reason.

Before we get in to the real work of accounting for the value of relationships, a word on my choice of treating relationships of friendship and relationships of romantic love together. The reader may wonder about the lack of a distinction here, especially since I am careful to separate out close personal relationships from others, such as parent-child relationships. I do not, in fact, think that friendship and romantic partnership are deeply different in kind. A particular friendship may be very different indeed from a particular romantic relationship, but the same might be said about two particular friendships, or two particular romantic relationships. There are potentially endless possibilities for the details of close personal relationships—their characteristic patterns of interaction, origin stories, typical shared activities, and the expectations of one another that their participants may share. These details will be determined by the particular participants in each case, and the account I offer in what follows can help to explain how that happens. But what friendships and romantic relationships have in common, it seems to me, is that they are typically voluntary and between equals in the sense explained above. To the extent that other kinds of relationships share these features, they can be taken to be included, and to the extent that

particular friendships and partnerships do not share these features, they can be taken to be excluded.

CHAPTER ONE

AN ANALYSIS OF CLOSE PERSONAL LOVE

In this chapter, I build my positive account of a certain kind of love that grounds and forms the basis of close personal relationships. The kind of love I have in mind is the sort we typically find between two partners in a close relationship—the sort we think of as a relationship of romantic love, or the relationship of friendship. I take it that there is no deep difference in kind between the sort of *love* that exists between romantic partners and the sort of *love* that exists between friends. The difference between the two is rather to be explained in terms of the particular *relationships* in question. My reasons for this should become clear in the course of my arguments throughout the chapter. It is worth noting at the outset, however, that the sort of relationship I have in mind and seek to elucidate is the phenomenon we currently recognize as friendship or romantic love—it is selective, and deeply personal, and is typically entered into voluntarily.¹

My project in this chapter is partly descriptive and partly normative. I intend both to be faithful to the phenomenology of love,² and also to make some moves in the direction of normative claims about when close personal love and its corresponding relationships are appropriate or inappropriate. I begin in Section 1 with some general reflections on the desiderata for an account of this variety of love and its corresponding kind of relationship, before moving on in Sections 2, 3, and 4 to discuss some of the extant views of love in relation to these desiderata. This provides the framework for my positive account, which I build toward throughout these sections. Finally, in Section 5, I show what is distinctive about my account and why it better captures the desiderata than do its major competitors.

¹ The sort of relationship I have in mind thus differs from ancient conceptions of friendship. My intention is that the sort of attitude and corresponding relationship under discussion in the present chapter should be a recognizable feature of most readers' lives.

² Unless otherwise specified, when I speak of "love" in this chapter, I intend the sort of close personal love that typically exists between romantic partners and friends.

My positive view of close personal love has three key features that distinguish it from others. First, on my account, the object of close personal love is a person's *character*, where this is understood to be a structure of dispositions and attitudes that are particularly distinctive of that person. I understand a person's character to be very importantly related to her *system of values*, a system that is both a partial explanation of the person's character, and the explanation of close personal love for the person where it exists. Finally, on my account, *imperfection* is extremely important. I take it that human imperfection is necessary for understanding the phenomenon of close personal love in a general way—it is because we are limited in certain respects that we need and value close personal relationships.³ Additionally, and perhaps more surprisingly, I will argue that we in fact love people in part *for* their imperfections. This feature of close personal love will be explained by seeing love as a response to a person's character understood as an imperfect expression, or interpretation, of a particular value system, which itself is imperfect. Before I can spell out my account or offer criticisms of others, however, I should lay out what I take to be the conditions for an adequate account of close personal love.

1. Desiderata

First, it seems to be necessary that the sort of close personal love with which I am concerned in this chapter should be selective, or discriminatory. We need an explanation for why it is that we love only some people in this way, and for why it seems to matter that we

³ I argue more fully for this point in the next chapter.

love the particular people we do rather than others. Our account of love should be able to account for the intuition that I have more reason to love my partner than to love someone else. When I love someone, it is essential that the person I love is the person in question, and our account should identify what it is about that person that is especially relevant to my love for him. My love for a particular person must be explained, at least in part, by features or qualities that are distinctive of that person. I call this the *Selectivity Requirement*.

However, the *object* of close personal love should be the *person* that is loved. It should not be some quality or qualities of the beloved, since this would seem to lead to the substitution objection. Roughly, the idea of this objection is that if I love a person for her qualities such as beauty, wit, kindness, and so on, my love should be indifferent to the substitution of a different person with all of the same qualities that my beloved has, and this would seem to be an unattractive implication.⁴ A satisfactory account of close personal love must give content to the idea that when I love a person, what I love is *precisely that person*. The object of my love should turn out to be the person him- or herself rather than a bundle of qualities or an idealized version of that person. I call this the *Correct Object Requirement*. This requirement is related to the previous one, but it is different in that here the focus is on correctly identifying the object of love, whereas the focus of the Selectivity Requirement was on the discriminatory character of love.⁵ There are problems to untangle here. For example, it is not immediately clear whether the object of this sort of love should be the person who

⁴ Niko Kolodny explains the substitution objection to the Quality Theory in “Love as Valuing a Relationship,” *The Philosophical Review* 112 (2003): 135-189. I discuss this objection in more detail toward the end of this chapter, once my positive view is on the table.

⁵ Whereas the concern of the previous point was to ensure that the account can explain why I love Joe rather than Jack, the concern of this point is to ensure that the account can explain why I love Joe rather than (e.g.) something that Joe represents, or some collection of properties that Joe instantiates. The previous point concerned the intuition that qualities do make a difference to love, whereas this point is intended to ensure that love is not characterized as responsive merely to qualities.

stands in the appropriate causal relationship with the lover, or the person who has the right character. More on this later. Despite these complexities, we can say that it is plausible that the object of personal love should be the specific person in some sense, and our account of love should elucidate that sense.

Third, an adequate account of love should construe love as something that can be one-directional, or, to put it another way, unrequited. It should be possible for me to love someone in the close personal sense while he or she does not love me back in this way. When love is one-directional in this way, there is no *relationship* of the relevant kind based on love, which shows the need for a distinction between the attitude of love and relationships that are based on this attitude. Furthermore, it should be possible that two people both have the relevant love attitude towards one another, but that there is no relationship of the relevant kind between them. That is to say, a relationship of the kind in question is more than the sum of its participants' love attitudes. I call this the *Attitudinal Requirement*. This requirement is more than a mere conceptual distinction—we should expect that relationships that are based on the kind of love under consideration give rise to reasons that do not arise out of love without the context of a relationship even though there may be (indeed, I think it is clear that there are) some reasons that arise simply out of the love itself, regardless of whether a close relationship is in place.

Fourth, the sort of love under consideration must be specifically personal in the sense that it must be meaningfully distinguished from love of animals, objects, activities, abstract principles or anything else. Whatever is going on when I love my romantic partner or my friend, it is quite profoundly different from what is going on when I love my cat, a painting, performing on stage, or egalitarianism. An adequate account of close personal love

must capture and account for this difference, and the difference should presumably be explained in part by something that makes persons specially different from other things. I call this the *Personal Requirement*.

Fifth, the sort of love that concerns us here must be different from infatuation or mere admiration. There is an important difference between an adolescent's infatuation with a celebrity—or another adolescent, for that matter—and the sort of love that an adult typically feels towards a long-time partner, or the sort of love we feel for our close friends. The former lacks some maturity and depth that characterizes the latter. An adequate account of love must capture this maturity and depth, and must be able to distinguish it from mere infatuation or admiration. I call this the *Maturity Requirement*. One way of understanding this point is to think of close personal love as more reasonable or justified than mere infatuation or admiration. However, there is the risk of putting too much stress on justification. Love should not be subject to such rigorous standards of justification that it loses its character as love altogether. Love should be reasonable in that it is the sort of thing that we often recognize as a legitimate and even strong reason for action, but it need not be justified by abstract, universal principles.

Finally, we should expect our account of love to be able to explain the genesis, sustenance, and decay of love for a person. We should have some sort of explanation of how it is that I come to love a person, why it is that I continue to love that person when I do, and what happens when I cease to love that person if I do. This account should not diverge too far from our actual experience, but it should be able to say something about when cases of “falling in love” or “falling out of love” are merely apparent rather than actual cases of genesis or decay of the sort of love under consideration. It should also ideally have

something to say about when the genesis, sustenance, and decay of close personal love is appropriate or inappropriate. I call this the *Explanatory Requirement*.

We can sum up these desiderata as follows. Our account of close personal love should account for its *selectivity*; it should identify the *object* of love as a person; it should distinguish the *attitude* of love from relationships that typically embody it; it should distinguish *personal love* from love of anything else; it should imbue love with the appropriate *maturity and depth*; and it should provide an *explanation* of the *genesis, sustenance, and decay* of love. Having laid out these general criteria for a satisfactory account of close personal love, I consider next three major extant views to see how they measure up. I consider the views of J. David Velleman, Harry Frankfurt, and Niko Kolodny in turn.

2. Love as “Really Seeing” a Deeper Something

In an influential paper, J. David Velleman addresses the apparent tension between love and impartial morality by providing an account of love on which love is both selective (partial) and consistent with the impartiality requirement of morality.⁶ He suggests that the key to solving the problem of apparent conflict is to recognize that love is in fact not objectionably partial. In developing his account of love, Velleman draws on ideas from Iris Murdoch in *The Sovereignty of Good* in which she emphasizes the ethical value of attending to particulars, or “*really looking*.”⁷ Velleman argues that love is an arresting awareness of a value

⁶ J. David Velleman, “Love as a Moral Emotion,” *Ethics* 109 (1999): 338-374.

⁷ Velleman, “Love as a Moral Emotion,” 342. See also Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970).

inherent in the person that is its object—a value that becomes apparent when we *really look* at a person in this special sense. The essence of Velleman’s view is well summed up when he says:

The Kantian view is that respect is a mode of valuation that the very capacity for valuation must pay to instances of itself. My view is that love is a mode of valuation that this capacity *may* also pay to instances of itself. I regard respect and love as the required minimum and optional maximum responses to one and the same value.⁸

There are several aspects of Velleman’s account to which I am sympathetic, and which offer valuable insights into the nature of love. In the present chapter, I am not concerned with the merits of Velleman’s view insofar as it proposes a solution to the apparent problem of conflict between love and morality.⁹ My interest, rather, is in an adequate analysis of the phenomenon of love. In what follows, therefore, I consider the strengths and weaknesses of Velleman’s view as an account of close personal love of the kind that concerns me in this chapter.¹⁰ I will suggest that, despite the valuable insights Velleman elucidates—specifically, of love as a matter of ‘really looking’ and seeing something somehow deep, obscure, and valuable—the account has certain weaknesses. In particular, it seems that Velleman’s view does not adequately incorporate what I have called the Selectivity Requirement, the Correct Object Requirement, and the Maturity Requirement.

Recall that love, on Velleman’s account, is an attitude toward another person that is the optional maximum corresponding to the attitude of Kantian respect as a required

⁸ Velleman, “Love as a Moral Emotion,” 366.

⁹ I do, however reconsider Velleman’s account in this respect in Chapter 4 below.

¹⁰ It is interesting that Velleman in fact says that he is interested in the sort of love between close adult friends and life-partners. See Velleman, “Love as a Moral Emotion,” 351.

minimum; it is essentially a response to a person's rational nature, or better self.¹¹ Once I become aware of this better nature of the person, I drop my emotional defenses against the person, rendering myself vulnerable to them.¹² Velleman's account is intended to be Kantian, and as such invokes some major metaphysical commitments. Specifically, on Velleman's account, we come to love particular people because of their phenomenal natures (empirical personae), but love is properly a response to their noumenal selves (their true, or better, natures).

There are serious questions about how well this picture could be reconciled with the rest of what Kant says about phenomena and noumena. For example, is it plausible, on a Kantian metaphysical account, that I could ever come to see another person's noumenal self? Is it plausible that my love for my friend is a response to a noumenon? I suspect, though it is beyond the scope of my project to argue for it here, that the answer to both of these questions is negative on a faithful interpretation of Kant. Moreover, even if Velleman's account of love were reconciled with a faithful interpretation of Kant, it strikes me as problematic to explain the very familiar and recognizable phenomenon of love by invoking an obscure and questionable metaphysics rife with interpretive and epistemic difficulties. I suggest, therefore, though it may be contrary to Velleman's intentions, that the most fruitful reading of his use of Kantian notions is rather metaphorical. In what follows, therefore, I am adopting some of the elements of Velleman's account while *not* intending them as Kantian.

On my suggested metaphorical reading of Velleman's picture, the most important elements of the account are as follows. Love is a response to something in a person that is

¹¹ Velleman, "Love as a Moral Emotion," 365-366.

¹² Velleman, "Love as a Moral Emotion," 371.

perceived as valuable, and as somehow underlying the more superficial qualities of the person. The aspect of a person that is seen as especially valuable, and which is thus the object of love, is a capacity that all persons share—the capacity for rationality. This capacity is what makes persons valuable, and in this sense, it is the “better” nature of a person. That is, the capacity for rationality is the ground of my love for a person even if the person has some superficial characteristics that do not perfectly exhibit that capacity. When I get to know a person well enough—when I *really look*¹³—what I see is their extremely valuable rational nature (understood here simply as the capacity for rationality). Once I see this aspect of the person, I drop my emotional defenses against them, rendering myself vulnerable to them. This is the attitude of personal love, on the metaphorical interpretation of Velleman’s account. So understood, it seems that there is much in this view that is correct.

First, the idea that loving someone renders me vulnerable to them—that I drop my emotional defenses because I no longer see them as necessary—seems characteristic of the experience of love. This is why in loving someone, it is often the case that I trust him or her, and indeed, it would seem that in ideal cases of love, I *should* trust my beloved. Second, there seems some truth to the idea that when I love someone, there is something of value in them that I am able to see but that others who do not love this person do not see, and that the reason for this seems to have something to do with some compatibility between us on a somewhat superficial level. This suggests both that love is aroused by the more superficial aspects of a person, but is more deeply a response to something of higher value, less superficial, and somehow more obscure. My love for my friend, Catherine, is aroused by the

¹³ As noted above, the phrase “really looking” comes from Murdoch’s *The Sovereignty of Good*, which Velleman repeatedly invokes to describe the phenomenon of love. What we see when we “really look” in the way characteristic of love, according to Velleman, is the person’s better self or rational nature.

fact that we have similar hobbies, for example, but once I truly love her, this is because I somehow know and appreciate something about her true self that others do not. This model seems to work for the sort of love that characterizes romantic relationships as well.

A problem arises, however, when we think about what this somehow deeper, valuable aspect is that I come to know and appreciate when I love a person. Note that if it is a capacity that all persons share, it is in principle possible for me to come to love *any* person just as I love Catherine if only I were able to see through his or her superficial qualities to his or her better self—his or her rational nature. It is not practically possible, of course, both because there are limits to the number of people I can come to know well enough to see their “true selves” and because features of my particular personality might make it exceptionally difficult to see the underlying value beneath certain kinds of characteristics in others.¹⁴ But since the real ground of my love for Catherine is something she shares with all other persons, it is in principle possible for me to love anyone else just as I love her. I suspect that this is not the case for the kind of love that concerns me in this chapter.¹⁵ On Velleman’s account, my loving Catherine in particular rather than someone else does not have anything *deeply* to do with the differences between Catherine and the other person.

But since my love for Catherine *does* seem to have something deeply to do with her uniquely identifying characteristics, Velleman’s construal of the object of love as a capacity that all persons share does not adequately account for the intuitions behind the Selectivity Requirement. Moreover, the particular capacity that he posits as the ground of love seems to

¹⁴ See Velleman, “Love as a Moral Emotion,” 372.

¹⁵ There may be other kinds of love, to be investigated elsewhere, which are such that I could come to love any other person, given the opportunity. I merely doubt that this is the case for close personal love of the kind that characterizes close friendships and romantic relationships.

me an unlikely candidate. The first point to note in this regard is that this is not the way we would ordinarily think of love. If asked why I love Catherine, I would be unlikely to offer Catherine's rationality as a reason. It is certainly not the case that we ordinarily take the object of our love to be a transcendently free, noumenal self who legislates the moral law for itself. But even on the metaphorical interpretation of Velleman that I suggested above, the capacity for rationality strikes me as an implausible object or ground of close personal love. There are many aspects of Catherine's character that I might cite as reasons for loving her that do not obviously indicate her rational nature.¹⁶

Indeed, some of the reasons that I love my friends seem to be *imperfections*. This is an aspect of our common experience of love that would be ruled out or quite mysterious on Velleman's view. There may be aspects of Catherine that I do not particularly admire, or aspire to, but that I nevertheless find endearing. I may think that she has too great a fear of inconveniencing others, for example. It may be that I think her concern is misplaced and that without it she would better be able to achieve certain goals and fulfilments—but insofar as I recognize that her commitment to not inconveniencing others is very much a part of who she is, I love her for it (in part). This can be the case even if I think the commitment in question is irrational. Velleman's account would seem only to be able to account for the most admirable aspects of Catherine's character to be appropriate triggers for love. I use the word "triggers" here because on Velleman's account, Catherine's commitments, or indeed her whole character, would presumably never be the appropriate object or ground of my

¹⁶ Of course, there is a sense in which any particularly *human* characteristic of Catherine's will have something to do with her rational nature, in that if what differentiates persons from other beings and objects. My point is that there are some aspects of people for which I love them, that are not particularly good indicators of rational nature. I am grateful to Richard Bett for pressing me on this point.

love for her. The proper object and ground of my love for her would have to be her personhood—her capacity for rationality, according to Velleman.

I suggest that the problem with construing love as a response to the capacity of rationality, or any bare capacity, is that it is a misidentification. As I have said, I think that Velleman's account gets something right in that it posits something deeper, more obscure and more valuable than the qualities (or "quirks") that superficially characterize a person. I think that Velleman errs, however, when he identifies this with a capacity that all persons share (or any bare capacity for that matter). I submit, therefore, that his account does not satisfy either the criterion of the Selectivity Requirement or the criterion of the Correct Object Requirement.

What I mean when I say that I love my friend Catherine is not that I love her because I can really see and understand in a deep way that she is *a* person, but rather that I love her because she is *the person that she is*. It is this *particular individual* that is the object of my love. My appreciation of her is not the same as my appreciation of Julie, though I love Julie too, and just as much (to the extent that it makes sense to quantify such things). Rather, I love Julie because she is the person *she* is, and that is quite a different person from the person Catherine is. This point is seen particularly clearly when we consider the loss of a friend—when a close friend dies, the loss is irremediable because a specific friend has been lost. It may well be the case that I could find a new friend whom I would love just as much as Tricia—indeed, I might find several such friends. But no new friend, nor any number of

new friends, can fill the specific place of Tricia in my life because the object of my love was Tricia—the particular person.¹⁷

Whatever it is that I have come to appreciate and love in Catherine, it is not a simple collection of qualities—a particular sense of humor, a certain level of intelligence, a degree of integrity, and so on. It does seem to have some connection to these qualities or characteristics, however—that was the point of the Selectivity Requirement. Rather than being a mere collection of qualities, the deeper something that I love in Catherine seems to be something that unifies these various qualities, or underlies them—some kind of structural feature. This suggests to me that what it is that I really love in Catherine is her *character*, understood as a complex and somewhat stable structure of dispositions and attitudes that notably distinguish her from everyone else that I know.¹⁸ My proposal, then, is that the real object of close personal love is the beloved person's character. It is because Julie and Catherine have different characters that I love them differently (though perhaps to the same degree or extent), and it is because no-one else has Tricia's character that her death is an absolutely irremediable loss for me.

My final objection to the sort of view that Velleman advocates is that it risks not sufficiently incorporating the Maturity Requirement. To see why, it will be useful to say something about what I take to be the case when I am *infatuated* with someone. I think a clear and useful model here is the attitude that adolescents typically have toward celebrities, though infatuation is certainly not limited to this model. When my thirteen-year-old self

¹⁷ While Velleman could certainly accommodate this point, since he takes the value of an individual to be an incomparable dignity, I disagree with his explanation, or what I assume it would be. It seems to me that it *is*, in part, the particular characteristics of Tricia that make her irreplaceable. Her irreplaceability is not wholly explained by any valuable capacity that she shares with all other persons.

¹⁸ I give a more explicit definition of what I take character to be, as well as a potential problem for this view, when I state my full view in section 5 of this chapter.

believed that Mick Jagger was meant for her, a large part of what was going on seems to have been a matter of blindness to imperfections. The object of my infatuation was not a real person at all, but an extremely idealized imaginary version of himself. An important part of what distinguishes my love for my partner, Joe, and my former infatuation with Mick Jagger, it seems to me, is that my love for Joe is open to seeing imperfections in his character and accepting them—indeed even loving him for them (in part) because they are part of what make him the unique human being with whom I have chosen to develop a relationship. My love for Joe is much more of a case of “really looking” than was my infatuation with Mick Jagger.¹⁹ Though I commend Velleman’s attempt to elevate love above a mere drive or urge, I think that this is a respect in which Velleman’s account in fact ends up looking more like infatuation than love—it seems to involve a (possibly willful) blindness to imperfection.

If real love involves dropping one’s emotional defenses against a person, as Velleman thinks it does, and if it is also a response to an idealized, “better” version of the person, as Velleman seems to think it is, this would seem to make love problematically risky. I do not mean to deny that there are significant risks involved in loving a person. Indeed, this is one of the aspects of Velleman’s account that I think is correct. But we need to be able to distinguish between cases of reasonable and unreasonable risk. There are cases where we want to say that people render themselves vulnerable to the people they love in ways that they should not, while in other cases, rendering oneself vulnerable to the other is perfectly reasonable and even admirable because it enables the establishment of a very meaningful close relationship. This, I take it, is a key difference between infatuation and mature love.

¹⁹ In this connection, I find Elijah Millgram’s criticism of Velleman’s account especially useful. See Millgram, “Kantian Crystallization,” *Ethics* 114 (2004): 511-513 at 513.

It seems to me that it would be most appropriate to drop one's emotional defenses and render oneself vulnerable to another when one has paid attention to the actual dispositions and attitudes of that person, and *thereby* come to believe that the emotional defenses are no longer necessary. It does seem that someone is being unreasonable if she renders herself vulnerable to a particular person who has repeatedly broken her trust and displayed an attitude of insufficient concern for her in the past. On Velleman's account, what we see when we "really look," and what justifies our disarming our emotional defenses, is a capacity that all persons share—indeed, a capacity to be better than they in fact are. For this reason, his account can seemingly not distinguish inappropriate cases from appropriate cases of dropping one's emotional defenses.²⁰ For this reason, I think incorporating honest awareness of imperfections into our account of love is very important. The best way to do this, I suggest, is by understanding the object of close personal love to be a person's character. More needs to be said, however, about what a person's character is, and why it can be the object of love in this way. I think there are some clues to be found in the sort of account Frankfurt espouses, which I discuss next.

3. Love as Endorsement of a System of Values

In this section, I respond to the account of love that Harry Frankfurt gives in *The Reasons of Love*.²¹ I will suggest that his account fails to adequately satisfy the criteria that I

²⁰ I should note that I do not think Velleman's account of love amounts to *infatuation*—his characterization of it as not essentially involving desires prevents that. But I do think it might have something unattractive in common with infatuation insofar as it involves a kind of blindness to imperfections.

²¹ Harry Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

have called the Maturity Requirement, the Personal Requirement, and the Correct Object Requirement. Loving something, for Frankfurt, is a matter of having final ends with which we identify, and is in fact what ensures the right connection between us and our final ends.²² On Frankfurt's account, we can love a great many kinds of things—objects, activities, pursuits, principles, and people. Frankfurt rejects the notion that love is a response to perceived value; rather, love can arise in any number of ways.²³ One can come to love something or someone that she does not see as valuable, at least initially. She will come to see the object of her love as valuable, but that is *because* she loves it. Once one loves something, she views that thing as valuable for its own sake, regardless of any use it may have for her. The object of love is not substitutable. Love is not under our direct voluntary control. Finally, for Frankfurt, loving something entails identifying with its interests, which in the case of a person will most importantly be what the person loves—the person's final ends.²⁴

It should already be clear that my view is significantly at odds with Frankfurt's, since I am inclined to see love—or at least, the close personal love under discussion here—as a response to something in a person that is perceived as valuable (specifically, the person's character). Another way of putting this point is to say that whereas Frankfurt does not see love as necessarily being responsive to a certain kind of reason, I do. I think that Frankfurt is correct that we often come to love things (even people) for all kinds of reasons and perhaps for no reason at all in some cases, but I think he is wrong to identify this *coming to love* with

²² Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, 55.

²³ Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, 38.

²⁴ Frankfurt develops the account I have sketched in the barest outline here in *The Reasons of Love*, 35-68.

love itself. Recall my description of how I ended up in the state of loving my friend, Catherine. It all began with our having similar hobbies. My love for Julie began with us being enrolled in an interesting and challenging course together, and discussing the material with one another. My love for each of my friends plausibly arose in very different ways. But, importantly, it would not have been true to say that I loved Catherine when we were simply enjoying similar activities together, nor would it have been true to say that I loved Julie while we were simply discussing course material together. These were the enabling conditions of me coming to love them, but in both cases, the love itself came later. It was only true to say that I loved Catherine and Julie once I had come to know each of them better—once I had a much better idea of what each of their characters was like.²⁵

It seems to me that once the relationship is firmly established, and it is true to say that I love Catherine or Julie, this love *is* responsive to a certain kind of reason. I love Julie *because she is the person that she is*, and if her character were to change dramatically, it may well be that my love for her would decay or disappear. Frankfurt would deny that there are reasons for love even in this case—my perception of Julie as valuable *depends* on my loving her, on Frankfurt's account. This seems false to me. When I ask myself why I love Julie, it seems to me that there are all sorts of reasons I can give—descriptions of her attitudes and dispositions which seem quite essential to my loving her. If everything I currently know and love about Julie were to suddenly change, yet my attitude of love towards her remained, I imagine I would be extremely confused and upset. I do not mean to deny that this *could* happen, but I think that it would be very *strange* if it were to happen; it would seem that

²⁵ Niko Kolodny makes a similar point about the way we come to love, and concludes that love arises because we develop a certain attitude toward the relationship. I think this is interesting, and may be true in some cases, but I think it can also happen the other way around—that love arises first, and the relationship develops later (though this may be rare). I return to this point later.

something had gone wrong, and would require explanation. I disagree, therefore, with Frankfurt's assertion that love is not subject to reasons.

This is one respect in which I think Frankfurt's account is deficient, and in which I hope to do better. Given that I take the object of close personal love to be the beloved's character, I would argue that it is only possible to love someone if one knows that person pretty well.²⁶ Frankfurt's account would have it that I could love someone without any knowledge of their character at all, for love can arise for just about any reason, or even for no reason at all. I think my view, which I continue to develop throughout this chapter, makes love not only less mysterious in its workings—it seems easier to see how my loved one appears to me as being especially valuable if my love is a response to something that I have paid special attention to—but also deeper, more admirable, and more mature than the sort of attachment Frankfurt describes.²⁷ I think that Frankfurt's account, therefore, remains open to the charge that he has not satisfied the Maturity Requirement. If love must arise in response to a person's character, as I would have it, it is at least necessary that one has actually paid attention to and recognized something as valuable in the beloved. It is possible, of course, that mistakes in attributing value, or even in identifying dispositions and attitudes,

²⁶ While this point *seems* to suggest that love presupposes a close personal relationship, I do not in fact think this is the case. Most of the time, we only know people well enough to love them in the sense under discussion when we do have an established relationship of some kind. But it is *possible* that I could come to love someone in the relevant sense after reading their autobiography, or perhaps even a biography written by a third party. It seems to me that what is required for me to know the person well enough to love them would be to have some detailed knowledge of their value system, and how it is typically manifested in their actions and decisions—this is to know someone's character. I discuss this in some more detail later this chapter.

²⁷ Frankfurt does wish to distinguish “true and intelligent” love from indulgence or gratification, and he does this by adding the condition that when one loves, one's concern for the beloved is disinterested, or concerned with the interests of the beloved for the beloved's own sake. (See *The Reasons of Love*, 79.) This may work to distinguish love from indulgence and gratification, but I do not think it necessarily distinguishes love from infatuation.

could be made, and mistakes presumably often are made. Nevertheless, we have an ideal case here that makes sense.

The second serious problem with Frankfurt's account, as I see it, is that it does not adequately distinguish between love of objects, activities, or principles on the one hand, and persons on the other. It does not satisfy what I have called the Personal Requirement. For Frankfurt, when I love a person, I love whatever is in that person's true interests. There certainly seems to be something to the idea that my close personal love for a person has something to do with my attitude to the things she cares most about. I think, however, that there is a missing category in Frankfurt's account. It seems to make an immensely important difference that persons, unlike objects, activities, or principles, are themselves capable of love.²⁸

Consider the difference between my love for my cat, Cole, and my love for my partner, Joe. In loving Cole, I take him to be valuable for his own sake, and moreover, I take the satisfaction of his best interests to be valuable for its own sake. I love Cole in such a way that he is not substitutable—it is Cole that I love, and I would not be satisfied if he were replaced with another cat. My love for Cole is not under my direct voluntary control—there is a sense in which I am helpless to love him. In loving Cole, the furtherance of his best interests comes to be an important end for me—in this sense, I come to identify with Cole's best interests.²⁹ Frankfurt's account seems to work pretty well as an account of my love for Cole. But there are important differences between my love for Cole and my love for Joe that

²⁸ This is a respect in which I find Velleman's account to be much stronger than Frankfurt's. I depart from Velleman, however, in that I do not think the capacity for rationality can be the whole story, or the ultimate story.

²⁹ All of these features of my love for Cole are included in Frankfurt's general account of love. See *The Reasons of Love*, 35-68.

I do not think can be adequately captured by Frankfurt's account, and these differences have to do with a crucial difference between persons and non-persons. Persons alone can love, in the sense that they have final ends. When we love persons, therefore, part of what is involved in loving them is taking a certain attitude toward the beloved person's final ends.³⁰ Frankfurt takes this attitude to be one of identification. In what follows, however, I argue that the attitude of close personal love is *not* one of simple identification with the beloved's final ends. It makes an important difference that a person's true interests include final ends of his or her *own*. To see this point, it will be useful to compare love for an animal with love for a person in more detail.

Cole has certain characteristics and tendencies that make him particularly lovable to me: he is affectionate, playful, and vocal. This might suggest that Cole has a character, and indeed may explain why Cole is irreplaceable as the object of my love for him. But Cole's character, insofar as he has one, is not an expression of commitment to final ends—it is not because Cole is committed to the good of cuddling that he is affectionate towards me, and it is not because Cole holds conversation to be highly valuable that he is vocal. Cole's tendency to bask in the late afternoon sun does not reveal that he values relaxation in the sense in which a person might value relaxation. These characteristics of his are much more superficial, or simply quirky. Joe, on the other hand, has characteristics and dispositions that do seem to be importantly related to certain final ends that he holds. Joe's tendency to read a great deal of non-fiction reveals that he is studious, and values learning. Joe's tendency to talk with me about subjects of mutual interest indicates that he values stimulating

³⁰ This is assuming, with Frankfurt, that loving something entails having an interest in what is in that thing's true interests. A person's final ends are going to be relevant to her true interests, and so if I love a person, I will have some interest in her final ends.

conversation with an intellectual equal. My love for Joe may include many of the same components as my love for Cole—I perceive them both as valuable for their own sakes, they are both irreplaceable as objects of my love, and loving each of them provides me with important respective final ends. But my love for Joe is more complex, because my attitude toward his best interests is more complex, and this is not merely because his interests are more complex (although that is certainly part of the story).

Unlike Cole, Joe has *final ends*—things he values very highly, for their own sake, and which give his other ends and pursuits a sense of purpose.³¹ What is in Joe’s best interests, then, includes having these sorts of final ends—something that he cares very deeply about, and which make his life meaningful for him. On this point, Frankfurt and I are in agreement. Where I depart from Frankfurt’s proposal is in terms of the attitude that *I* take towards Joe’s final ends when I love him. For Frankfurt, to love something is to identify with its true interests. This would mean that for me to love Joe would be for me to identify with his final ends. I do not think that this is accurate, however. In loving Cole, as I suggested before, I do indeed seem to identify with his true interests. If it is in Cole’s interests to go to the vet, taking Cole to the vet becomes an important interest of mine. If Cole’s true interests require that he eat a particular type and amount of food, his eating this type and amount of food becomes an important interest of mine. The attitude that I take towards Joe’s final ends, in contrast, is not one of simple identification.³²

³¹ On the capacity to have final ends as being the basis of the value of human beings, see L. Nandi Theunissen, “On the Value of Human Beings,” (manuscript). Though the value of human beings as such is not my central concern here, I find Theunissen’s account quite plausible, and in particular, I think it is the capacity to have final ends that distinguishes persons from non-persons as potential objects of close personal love.

³² I think that “incorporation” might be a better term than “identification” for the way Frankfurt understands me to react to my beloved’s final ends. “Identification” seems better suited to an ancient conception of friendship, which relies heavily on the notion of shared ends, choices, and actions. Since this is

It is true that in loving Joe, I do take a positive attitude towards his final ends—I do endorse them. But I endorse them as *his* final ends, not as my own. We may (indeed we likely do) have some final ends in common, and we may have some joint final ends, but because we are in fact two different people, we do not *wholly* identify with one another's final ends. It seems perfectly possible that I could fully love Joe while not identifying with all of his final ends. A point that makes this somewhat clearer, I think, is to note that my various friends have rather different final ends—rather different value systems—and yet I love them all. Since their value systems differ from one another, I cannot possibly identify with all of their value systems, yet I love them all. Indeed, in some cases, what I take to be special about a particular loved one may be some element of her value system that is not part of my own, but that I recognize as valuable for my friend. Even though part of what I love about a person might be something that is in no way part of my own value system for myself, a kind of value pluralism can allow this result. This is what it means to endorse someone's value system as a good value system *for her*.

It is notable that Frankfurt's model for genuine love is the sort of love that parents have for their young children.³³ It seems to me that such a model is not at all appropriate for the kind of love between adults that characterizes close friendships and romantic partnerships. The relationship that parents have toward their young children is, among other things, one of guardianship and necessary care. This explains why it is appropriate that a parent should identify with the true interests of his child—he should make the ends of the child his own. But the relationship that exists between friends and romantic partners is not

not my concern in the present chapter, and since I would reject either candidate as the appropriate way to respond to a loved one's final ends in the case of close personal love, I say no more about it here.

³³ Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, 43.

typically—and, indeed, in ordinary cases should not be—one of guardianship. It is rather one of two persons with equal status and personal differences relating to one another in various ways. It seems to me that the full appreciation of one another, and concern for one another, that we would want in a relationship of this kind based on genuine love does not require complete identification of values. Indeed, it might benefit from, or be enriched by, some differences in values.

I suggest that the attitudes and dispositions of a person that are informed by his or her final ends are in fact evidence of a system of *values*.³⁴ The final ends with which I identify most deeply are my most deeply held values. A person's *character* is an imperfect expression of a system of values which itself may be imperfect. A person's system of values is likely to be imperfect because most (perhaps all) people's systems of values are likely to be less than fully worked out. They likely include some areas of uncertainty, and even conflicts. The reason why a person's character is likely to be an imperfect expression of his or her value system is that most (perhaps all) people can realize their most deeply held values in their characters only to a certain degree.

When a person loves another person, then, I suggest that the lover endorses the value system of the beloved in a deep and profound way. But this endorsement is *not* identification, or simply taking on the beloved's value system as one's own. If the endorsement were a matter of taking on the beloved's value system as one's own, the value

³⁴ I find Samuel Scheffler's account of what it is to value something to be quite plausible, but note that when I speak about a "system of values," I mean a system of actual, particular values that an individual holds, rather than the mere capacity for *valuing* that human beings have. This is why I sometimes speak of a person's *final ends* and use this phrase as interchangeable with the phrase *system of values*. See Scheffler, "Valuing," in *Equality and Tradition: Questions of Value in Moral and Political Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 15-40. Though there may be difficulties in equating final ends with values, for the sake of simplicity, I assume that the terms are co-extensive for an individual.

system itself rather than the person whose value system it is would in fact be the object of love.³⁵ If we reject the idea that loving someone entails taking on their value system as one's own (and I anyway think we should reject it), we will be able to draw a meaningful distinction between the person's character and their system of values in such a way that we can say that the person's *character* is the object of love. This in turn allows the view to satisfy the criterion that I have called the Correct Object Thesis.³⁶

To sum up where we are, let us recall what we have taken from and adapted from Velleman's and Frankfurt's respective accounts. What Velleman seems to get right is that love is a response to something rather deep and somehow obscure in a person, and that true love is not merely conative (i.e., it is not simply a *drive* or an urge)—it is admirable and mature in a way that infatuation is not. Where he goes wrong, I have suggested, is in identifying the object of love as bare rational personhood, or the capacity for rationality. Instead, I have suggested that it is a person's character, where this is understood as something structural (and therefore deep) and distinctive (and therefore obscure to those who don't know the person very well) about the particular individual that is loved. What Frankfurt seems to get right is that love involves a certain positive attitude towards what a person cares about most deeply; he has drawn attention to the importance of final ends. Once again, however, I have suggested that the object of personal love, rather than being the beloved's final ends, is the beloved's character, understood as an imperfect expression of the beloved's final ends or value system, a system which itself may be imperfect. Where Frankfurt goes wrong, I have suggested, is in his claim that love requires identification with

³⁵ This, it seems to me, is the difference between loving 'what someone stands for' and loving the person him- or herself.

³⁶ There may be a worry about identifying a person with her character, but I do not think it is very troubling. I return to this point later.

the final ends of the beloved. Moreover, I have suggested that this error is due to Frankfurt's failure to adequately distinguish love for a person from love for a non-person. Specifically, love for a person (understood as an adult with equal status) does not require full identification of value systems. It requires a different positive attitude towards the other's value system—endorsement understood as something other than full identification or incorporation. What exactly is involved in this kind of endorsement will, I think, become clearer when we consider some more details of what happens when we come to love, continue to love, or stop loving a person—the final component of my positive account of close personal love.

4. Love as Separable from Relationships

From what I have said so far, it should be clear that I take the beginning of love for a person to essentially involve a kind of appreciation of the beloved's character, understood as an expression of a system of values. My love for my friend, Monique, initially came about because of an alignment of my value system with hers. It is not that we have identical value systems; rather, we each endorse the value system of the other, specifically as a value system *for* the other. Our friendship has lasted many years, and a quick gloss of the explanation for this on the account offered thus far would be that our mutual love has been sustained by the continued alignment of, and our continued mutual endorsement of, our respective value systems. But this is too quick. Throughout the many years that Monique and I have been friends, our characters and value systems have both undergone significant changes, growth, and revision. Moreover, these changes occurred in each of us independently. Yet we have

remained friends, and indeed, our friendship itself has changed and developed. Rather than saying *simply* that our mutual love has been sustained by the continued alignment of and mutual endorsement of one another's value systems, we can say that it has been sustained *in part* by the fact that there have been no *detrimental* changes to these features of each of us. We need now to ask what *would* constitute detrimental changes. This will deepen our understanding of what is essential to the attitude of love.

We can get clearer on the details here if we consider some familiar descriptions of cases when relationships of love founder. Though I think (and will soon argue) that the attitude of love and relationships can come apart, looking at failed relationships is a useful place to start looking for significant features of decaying love. Here, I take over Niko Kolodny's extremely helpful summary of some common cases of failed relationships and loss of love.³⁷ Kolodny defends a view according to which relationships can be reasons for love of various kinds; they give us reason to value certain individuals in particular ways. This involves having certain feelings and beliefs, and it also involves being disposed to act in certain ways with regard to those individuals and one's relationships with them. As will become clear in the remainder of this section, while Kolodny's view and mine differ in some crucial ways, he has what I take to be some crucial insights into relationships of love. The three primary differences between Kolodny's account and the one I am developing are that (1) I take it that character is both the *reason for* and the *object* of close personal love, whereas Kolodny holds that the *relationship* is the reason for love, (2) I think the attitude of close personal love is *not* necessarily dependent on the context of a relationship, and (3) I think

³⁷ Kolodny, "Love as Valuing a Relationship," 164-166.

that while Kolodny's diagnosis in some cases is correct, it is but one instance of a more general phenomenon that my account will be able to capture.

Kolodny and I agree on several points. We agree that relationships tie me to my particular loved ones historically, through repeated interactions of relevant kinds.³⁸ Kolodny correctly points out that his account thus successfully avoids a particular version of the substitution problem.³⁹ We also agree that relationships, so understood, are often responsible for the sustenance of love between people, and that they can explain the differences between some kinds of love.⁴⁰ The difference between my love for my partner, Joe, and my love for my friends is explained by the fact that Joe and I have entered into a particular kind of relationship that includes exclusivity as an important component, for example. The observation that my relationship with Joe renders certain acts and attitudes with respect to him appropriate whereas the same sorts of acts and attitudes with respect to my friends would not be appropriate is very useful, and, I think, correct. But I think that my emerging account can capture these features of Kolodny's account, and a lot more besides. In particular, I think my account can do better in terms of what I have called the Attitudinal Requirement and the Explanatory Requirement.⁴¹ To show this, I turn now to discuss Kolodny's own examples of loss of love.

³⁸ Kolodny, "Love as Valuing a Relationship," 171.

³⁹ See Kolodny, "Love as Valuing a Relationship," 146. I return to this point when I discuss the substitution problem in section 5 of this chapter.

⁴⁰ Kolodny, "Love as Valuing a Relationship," 155.

⁴¹ I note that Kolodny would presumably simply deny that what I have called the Attitudinal Requirement is in fact a criterion for an adequate account of love. My argumentative task here can therefore be seen as in part providing a *motivation* for the Attitudinal Requirement rather than as showing that my account captures it better than Kolodny's does.

Kolodny isolates five ways that one's love could decay: (1) one realizes that one's friend/partner has insufficient concern for one; (2) one's friend/partner fails to act on reasons provided by the relationship; (3) one loses respect for one's friend/partner; (4) one feels that one's friend/partner is 'no longer the person she once was'; and (5) one is no longer attracted to one's friend/partner.⁴² I am largely in agreement with Kolodny about all of these points. However, I think that he has missed something more fundamental—something that seems to underlie, explain and unify a lot of the observations he makes about love, and this is the importance of the participants' respective attitudes toward one another's values. Indeed, I think that this element of love can solve some of the puzzles that Kolodny himself raises for his own account.

I think that Kolodny is correct that a lot of the sustaining and justifying work of love is done by the relationship, but I think we still need a satisfactory explanation and justification for the establishment and sustenance of the relationship. Once the relationship is in place, it itself is a major source of reasons, but that cannot be the whole story. It must be possible for love and relationships to come apart. In the remainder of this section, I explain how the participants' respective attitudes to one another's value systems can do better at explaining the decay of love than Kolodny's account does, with a view to drawing a clearer distinction between love and relationships than I have thus far.

The reason for the decay of love in Kolodny's first two cases is explained by just what he says it is. Part of valuing a relationship is to have concern for one's friend or partner, and to recognize and act on reasons generated by one's valuing that relationship. In the context of an established close relationship, part of the reason why I continue to love my

⁴² Kolodny, "Love as Valuing a Relationship," 164-166.

partner is that we both value that relationship. If my partner seems no longer to have concern for me, or if he fails to act on reasons generated by the relationship, it is reasonable that my love for him will weaken. The reason for this, I suggest, is that his lack of concern for me, or failure to act on the reasons generated by the relationship, is an indication that he values the relationship less than he previously did, less than I do, or less than I think he should. Part of what is involved in being in a close relationship with another person is that both of us value the relationship to a similar degree. In these first two cases, one party values that relationship much less than the other does. To this extent, there is a divergence in our respective value systems that is somewhat damaging to love.

Consider next the case where one loses respect for one's partner or friend—Kolodny's third case. The sort of case Kolodny has in mind here is a case where one begins to feel contempt or indignation towards one's friend or partner.⁴³ He suggests that the explanation for the connection between this loss of respect and loss of love is that one no longer sees one's friend or partner as an equal:

I have only a speculative suggestion to offer. The reason why friendship and romantic love, in particular, are vulnerable to the loss of respect has something to do with the fact that friendship and romantic love have something to do with viewing one's friend or lover as someone with equal standing. There must be symmetry in the partners' attitudes to each other, as a kind of background condition on friendship and romantic love.⁴⁴

I do not deny that mutual respect is a background condition of friendship and romantic love; however, it seems to me that this is no more a background condition of close personal love

⁴³ Kolodny, "Love as Valuing a Relationship," 164.

⁴⁴ Kolodny, "Love as Valuing a Relationship," 165.

than it is of any other decent interpersonal interaction between adults. That is to say, while I recognize it as a background condition, it is such a minimal background condition so as not to be distinctive of close personal love at all.⁴⁵ Moreover, when I begin to feel contempt or indignation toward my partner, this is not, it seems to me, a matter of no longer seeing him as a person with equal standing. That seems to be much too strong a description of the change in attitude. Rather, what seems to be the case is that I revoke my endorsement of certain commitments to values that I see in my partner, and this weakens (and in some cases may destroy) my love for him. If close personal love is particularly vulnerable to this sort of change in attitude, it is not because close personal love requires the background condition of mutual respect more than any other kind of love or interpersonal relation; it is because close personal love, more than any other kind, is characterized by mutual endorsement of value systems.⁴⁶

Next, consider Kolodny's fourth case—where one's friend or partner seems no longer to be the person she once was. Kolodny's response to this case is the following: "You have reason to love the man with whom you had a relationship. If the man before you is no longer *that* man, then you have no special reason to love him."⁴⁷ The problem with this response is that it requires an explanation—which Kolodny admits is "metaphysically vexed"⁴⁸—of how exactly it is possible that the person I love is no longer the person he once

⁴⁵ It is worth noting that Kolodny's inclusion of this condition does represent an advantage over Frankfurt's view, at least insofar as the latter is considered as an account of close personal love.

⁴⁶ Kolodny's example here involves a particularly reprehensible value statement on behalf of the imagined object of contempt or indignation—the case he describes is one in which a wife's attitude towards her husband changes because he begins denying the holocaust. I think that cases where the value statement is not so obviously reprehensible, but still represents a markedly different commitment to values, could fit just as well. Imagine, for example that after many years of sharing political views, one partner changes her mind about which political party she supports.

⁴⁷ Kolodny, "Love as Valuing a Relationship," 166.

⁴⁸ Kolodny, "Love as Valuing a Relationship," 165.

was, and in such a way that this change is relevant to love. It seems to me there is a much simpler explanation, which is plausible in its own right. What I mean when I say to my friend, “you are no longer the person you once were,” is not *literally* that the person with whom I began a friendship no longer exists, but rather that her *character* has changed so drastically that the love she once inspired in me seems now to have no object. It seems to me that the reason for this is that her values have changed substantially, so that there is no longer the right sort of fit between her values and mine to ground my love for her as a friend. This response has the advantage over Kolodny’s response that it can allow for love being *enhanced* by these sorts of changes in a person—it is possible that I come to love Monique *even more* than I once did precisely because she is ‘no longer the person she once was.’ My love can be strengthened by development of her character, and by changes in her value system that I regard as positive.

Finally, let us consider Kolodny’s fifth case—where my love for a person decays because I am no longer attracted to them. Kolodny notes that loss of attraction can have a weakening effect on love when “the relationship is partly constituted by participating in activities that are marked by attraction.”⁴⁹ This sort of case seems particularly relevant to relationships of romantic love. It may seem that attraction is one aspect of love that simply occurs, and has no connection to value systems. Perhaps attraction is a sort of initial enabling condition that allows us to get to know other people, and so come to appreciate their characters and value systems.⁵⁰ It is no doubt the case that attraction is a very complex, and somewhat mysterious, phenomenon. I cannot hope to give a complete account of it

⁴⁹ Kolodny, “Love as Valuing a Relationship,” 166.

⁵⁰ Something like this seems to be part of the account of love Plato gives in *Phaedrus*.

here. It does seem, however, that there is one plausible way in which attraction can be relevant to love on the account I am proposing.

Sometimes, attraction—even seemingly superficial physical attraction—indeed *does* have a connection with, and is in part explained by, our attitudes to others' value systems. I may have initially been attracted to Joe because of the ease and apparent authenticity of his smile, for example, because I took it to be evidence of a disposition or attitude, which I in turn take as evidence for a commitment to a certain sort of value. Of course, I am not claiming that this is a conscious thought process when we find ourselves attracted to other people. But I think it does adequately explain some phenomena of attraction. Consider, for example, how certain people tend to find a disheveled look attractive, while others tend to be attracted to impeccably groomed people. It seems to me that this could be explained by attraction being some sort of rough, initial assessment of a person's character and value system.⁵¹

So, where does this leave us with regard to the distinction between love and a relationship grounded on that love? The first two cases of loss of love that Kolodny describes essentially involve an established relationship. It is because the sustenance of love in the context of a close relationship is in part grounded by the two parties' recognition of

⁵¹ This may be oversimplified. I am grateful to Nandi Theunissen for pointing out that people often claim to be attracted to other people that they do not even like or approve of. Though, as I have said, I cannot hope to give a complete account of attraction here, this phenomenon is not necessarily incompatible with the rough analysis I have given here. It is plausibly the case that what we value is not always entirely transparent to us, and can be revealed through our actions and emotional vulnerabilities. (See Scheffler, "Valuing," 15-40.) Perhaps when I seem to be attracted to someone that I don't like, or of whom I disapprove, part of the explanation is some element of my value system of which I am not fully aware. Of course, the phenomenon could also be explained along the lines of a sort of pathological response, like masochism, but it seems to me that even that could be compatible with what I have said about attraction here. An interesting source in this regard, though I will not get into the details, is Sigmund Freud's writings on love and attraction. See Sigmund Freud, "Contributions to the Psychology of Erotic Life," collected in *The Psychology of Love* Translated by Shaun Whiteside (London: Penguin Classics, 2006) 239-278.

and commitment to the value of the relationship that changes of these first two sorts can damage or weaken that love. The way I have characterized the loss of love in Kolodny's third case, in contrast, does not seem to presuppose a close relationship.

It seems that I can deeply endorse commitment to certain values in a person when that person is neither my romantic partner nor my friend. Indeed, it seems that I could choose to end a relationship with someone even though I endorse his value system—as a value system specifically for him. I can recognize that it is so divergent from my own value system so as to make a continued relationship between us untenable, but nevertheless recognize that it is a good value system for him to have. A simple example of this sort of case would be if my partner decides to commit to Buddhism, and no longer recognizes the value of close relationships as being central to his good. I might recognize that his new commitment is good for him—it provides him with deep and profound fulfillment that was previously lacking in his life—but it should be clear that attempting to maintain my close relationship with him in this example would be misguided. This, I suggest, is a case of continued love in the absence of a relationship.

The connection between Kolodny's fourth case and the presence of a relationship is more complicated. It seems possible that I could wish to continue a relationship with someone even though she is 'no longer the person she once was'—this is precisely the sort of case I described where I take Monique's character development to be positive, and it in fact enhances my love for her.⁵² Our relationship may even be strengthened, if the fit between our respective value systems is enhanced by her development (or mine, for that

⁵² Of course, my character has also changed and developed, possibly in ways that enhance her love for me.

matter). But it seems equally possible that coming to see someone as ‘no longer the person she once was’ could be a reason for me to wish to end the relationship. This seems to be what is going on in the example I described where my partner loses his commitment to the value of close personal relationships. So, there is no simple connection between changes of character and the continuance or severance of a close relationship. Rather, the central issue seems to be whether the two parties’ value systems are sufficiently well aligned so as to make a close relationship between them appropriate. The details here might vary according to the type of relationship—there presumably needs to be a closer alignment of value systems in the case of a long-term romantic relationship than in the case of a friendship.⁵³

The question remains whether it is possible to love someone with whom one has never had a relationship. Perhaps considering Kolodny’s fifth case—that of attraction—can shed light on this matter. It seems to me that bare attraction can never amount to love. This is because attraction is at most a very rough and uncertain attribution of attitudes and dispositions, or value commitments, to another person. Love requires clearer perception, so to speak, of a person’s character and value system. This is the point of love being a response to something deeper and more obscure than I made in relation to Velleman’s account earlier in this chapter. But it is possible to have a clearer perception in this respect without being in a relationship of romantic love or friendship. For example, I might have a pretty clear idea of a teacher’s character and value system without him being my friend or romantic partner. I may deeply admire and endorse this value system as a value system for him. This, I suggest, is a case of love (specifically of the close personal variety) without the context of a close

⁵³ The degree of closeness of alignment between value systems that is required for a relationship may itself be dependent on the two parties’ respective value systems.

personal relationship.⁵⁴ In fact, I think it is even conceptually possible that I could love a person whom I have never met, if I had perhaps read a very well written and revealing autobiography of the person. If I became well enough ‘acquainted’ with the person’s character and value system through reading their biography, I could come to love them in the sense under discussion in this chapter.⁵⁵⁵⁶

Instances of this sort of phenomenon may be rare, and are likely often less deep and profound than instances of love in the context of a close personal relationship, but I think it would be a mistake to categorically rule them out, as Kolodny seems to do.⁵⁷ In sum, I think that Kolodny is correct that valuing a relationship is an important ground of love (certainly in the context of close relationships), but it is only one instance of a broader kind of ground for love: the appreciation and endorsement of a beloved’s system of values, as expressed through her character. Close personal relationships have as two crucial features (1) a shared history of repeated interaction of a relevant kind between the two parties, and (2) a shared commitment to the value of the relationship of roughly equal strength. But it is possible to

⁵⁴ Of course, for this to actually be a case of love rather than simply a case of admiration, there would have to be some accompanying affection, and emotional vulnerability involved. But still, it seems to me this is possible without the context of a relationship. I am grateful to Richard Bett for pressing me on this distinction.

⁵⁵ Perhaps an even more surprising consequence of my view is that it renders close personal love for fictional characters possible, provided that they are sufficiently well written and developed. I in fact take this to be a strength rather than a weakness of my view. It explains how the death of a fictional character can be quite heartbreaking.

⁵⁶ Kolodny and I would certainly disagree on this point. He in fact considers an imaginary case involving a biography writer and the subject of the biography (“Love as Valuing a Relationship,” 141-142). In discussing the case, he denies that love could exist between the two characters prior to their establishing a relationship, and that the change that occurs with the establishment of a relationship is categorical. I disagree—I think that in this case, there might indeed have been love prior to the relationship, but the relationship would of course deepen and intensify that love.

⁵⁷ See Kolodny, “Love as Valuing a Relationship,” 171: “Usually, when we speak of unrequited love or friendship, what we mean is not an unrequited non-instrumental concern, but instead an unrequited desire for a relationship.”

have the attitude of close personal love toward someone without either of these features holding—in other words, without the context of a relationship.

In the remainder of this chapter, I give a fuller statement of my positive view. I provide a more detailed account than I have thus far of what I take *character* to be, as well as its connection with a *system of values*. This leads me to give a fuller account of the role I take *imperfection* to play in close personal love. Finally, I consider and respond to a potential objection to my view—a version of the substitution objection.⁵⁸

5. Character, Imperfection, and the Substitution Problem

I have defined character as a somewhat stable structure of attitudes that underlie and unify a person's behavioral dispositions and tendencies.⁵⁹ Specifically, character is a structure of attitudes toward things as being valuable, or a *system of values*. Since I take character to be a *structural* feature of a person, character is not a simple collection, or set, of characteristics. Rather, it is the underlying, unifying, and uniquely identifying structure that might *explain* the actions and decisions of a person. But the reader may wonder what this structural feature

⁵⁸ The inspiration for the subsection on the substitution objection came about largely as a result of discussion surrounding my commentary on Aaron Mead's paper "Qualities as the Proper Grounds of Love," at the American Philosophical Association Eastern Division Meeting in Baltimore on December 28, 2013. I am grateful to Aaron Mead and the audience of that discussion for getting me thinking along these lines.

⁵⁹ Note that I make no reference to character *traits* as explaining human behavior. My view should therefore sidestep the familiar situationist objections to character. For the situationist critique of robust character traits as predictive of behavior, see Gilbert Harman "Moral Philosophy Meets Social Psychology: Virtue Ethics and the Fundamental Attribution Error," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 99 (1999): 315-331 and John Doris *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). For contemporary work on how the notions of character and dispositions can be useful and worth keeping around even if there are no robust character traits, see Mark Alfano, *Character as Moral Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). I am grateful to Jon Hricko for helpful conversations on this issue.

ultimately is—is it a network of beliefs, or emotional predispositions, perhaps? It is important to distinguish my understanding of character from either of these possible conceptions; rather, I take character to involve *both* beliefs *and* emotions.

First, a system of values is not merely a network of beliefs. It does, no doubt, involve some beliefs—my system of values includes the belief that friendship is valuable—but that is not all it is. My system of values also includes a disposition to feel joy when things go well for my friends, and a tendency to feel rather ill at the sight of gratuitous violence in entertainment.⁶⁰ This feature of a system of values is part of what I think makes it apt to call a person’s system of values their *character*—the notion of character is often thought to involve dispositions to *feel* in certain ways in particular circumstances. But, as already noted, there is also some cognitive content to a system of values. Part of what distinguishes persons from non-persons is that the former have systems of values—commitments to values, understood as final ends.⁶¹ So, a person’s character is a structure of commitments to values that involves beliefs and predispositions to feel and behave in particular ways in various circumstances.

Character, understood as this kind of complex structure, can explain why it is that a person may seem to have somewhat surprising quirks, given the overall background of their character.⁶² For example, Jeané seems generally to be excitable, romantic, and imaginative,

⁶⁰ Once again, I am indebted here to Scheffler’s account of what it is to value something. See especially “Valuing,” 29, where Scheffler lists the four elements involved in valuing something, *viz.* belief, susceptibility to emotions, seeing the relevant emotions as appropriate, and seeing the valued thing as deliberately significant.

⁶¹ Recall my discussion of the differences between my cat, Cole, and my partner, Joe, from earlier in this chapter. Cole may *seem* to have a character, in that he has certain characteristic likes and dislikes, and behavioral tendencies. But unlike Joe, Cole’s “character” is not revelatory of commitments to values.

⁶² I am grateful to Nandi Theunissen for getting me to think about these sorts of examples and their implications for the nature of character.

but she loves to relax by ironing clothes—a seemingly mundane and homely task. The explanation of these features of Jeané is to be found in her system of values—her attitudes toward certain things as valuable, and toward certain other things as disvaluable. Knowing Jeané well as I do, I know that she sees great value in passionate mental engagement with abstract ideas, and also sees disvalue in disorder, for example. It is noteworthy that only those of us who are well acquainted with Jeané can see these sorts of explanations; for those who do not know her very well, the combination of these features may be puzzling. This is as it should be—it strikes me as plausible that to really have an idea of someone’s character, it is necessary to be rather well acquainted with them.⁶³

I think that understanding character in terms of structures of attitudes, or value systems, enables us, to some extent, to predict our loved ones’ behavior, suggesting that this way of viewing character is germane to close personal love. Consider a familiar experience of feeling the loss of a loved one. When I lose a close friend, some of the times when this loss is felt most keenly is when I imagine what that friend might say in a particular situation, or when something happens that I imagine would delight that friend’s particular sense of humor.⁶⁴ In such a situation, I am overwhelmed with bittersweet affection for Tricia, as I am reminded of a particular aspect of her character for which I loved her. It seems that the explanation for this is that I am reminded of a particular *attitude* that Tricia held. It is not just that she was witty, but that she had particular ways of seeing things—and this is what explains why I imagine this particular scenario delighting her.⁶⁵ When I imagine Tricia

⁶³ It would not be sufficient, for example, to be given a list of characteristics that Jeané has.

⁶⁴ I am grateful to Julie Reid for bringing this point to my attention.

⁶⁵ This idea of a particular way of seeing things is reminiscent of John McDowell’s perceptual account of practical wisdom. I find this a very useful way to think about attitudes and values—as distinctive ways of seeing things—but I should be clear that I do not intend to relate this specifically to *virtue*. See McDowell, “Virtue and Reason,” *Monist* 62 (1979): 331-350.

reacting in a certain way in particular circumstances, I am calling to mind an attitude of hers toward some feature of the situation—an attitude that represents an element of her value system, and which is part of what uniquely identifies her.

An interesting and important point to note here is that the attitude I imagine Tricia exhibiting when she makes this comment may not be one that I find to be particularly admirable—it may be decidedly unkind. Nevertheless, it can be an attitude for which I loved her.⁶⁶ This leads us naturally to look more deeply into the idea that we love people in part for their *imperfections*. There are three major ways of understanding the point that we love people in part for their imperfections. I will discuss each of them in turn, in relation to the example of Tricia's unkind comment. First, though, it will be useful to briefly restate my view of the nature of character, attitudes and value systems. A person's character, I have said, is a unifying structure that underlies and can explain a person's behavioral tendencies and dispositions. This structure is a structure of attitudes toward things as being valuable. These attitudes taken together form a person's system of values. So, character is a structure of attitudes understood as commitments to values.⁶⁷

The first respect in which a person may incorporate imperfections is in terms of the *system* of values she holds. It is no doubt often, or even always, the case that our commitments to values form an imperfect system. There can be conflicts between particular values, or areas of uncertainty, for example. One's values constitute a system in that they, for

⁶⁶ Recall that as I described the example, I am overwhelmed with affection at this moment. I emphasize this point to avoid confusion: while the comment I imagine may indeed strike me as being an imperfection, it still represents something about Tricia *for which I loved her* and this is why at moments like this, her absence is felt most keenly. If this example (of an unkind comment) strikes the reader as an implausible example of the phenomenon I am intending to describe, perhaps the example of imperfection I used in Section 2 of this chapter will be preferable. The example there was of a person with too great a concern for not inconveniencing others.

⁶⁷ The commitments to values should not be understood as absolute; they can be of varying strengths.

the most part, usually form a somewhat stable structure that enables us to predict some general behavioral tendencies of the people we know well. But the system is unlikely to be perfect in the sense of being *perfectly systematic*. Perhaps Tricia's attitude, which I imagine giving rise to a certain unkind comment, represents an imperfection in that it is inconsistent with certain other attitudes she holds about the right way to treat other people. So understood, the imperfection would be an imperfection in the overall *system* of values that she holds.

It might be, instead, that Tricia's comment represents an imperfection in the sense that it is an imperfect *expression* of a particular value commitment. Perhaps she saw a great deal of value in making a timely and witty comment to lift the general mood whenever the opportunity presented itself, but she sometimes missed the mark, rendering her comment more spiteful than she might have wished. In this case, the imperfection is not necessarily in the system of values itself—there need not be any inconsistency or conflict between values—rather, the imperfection would be in her ability to properly express them, or live up to them. We can surely all identify with the feeling of not being able to fully live up our own ideals for ourselves.

Finally, the imperfection exhibited in Tricia's unkind comment may be in the *content* of the values themselves. It may be that some of the *elements* of Tricia's value system are imperfect in the sense that she values things that she ideally should not—enjoyment at the expense of others' misfortunes, perhaps. Here, the imperfection in question is not a matter of inconsistency within a system, or the inability to fully live up to one's own ideals, but rather a matter of having imperfect values. Now, I do not think we need to choose between these three explanations of the imperfection; I think they all describe real phenomena, and

that any one of them could be true in this particular case. The pertinent question, though, is *why* imperfections understood in any of these ways could be partial grounds of *love* for a person. If I view this attitude of Tricia's as somehow representing an imperfection, but I nevertheless am keenly aware that it is one of the aspects of her *for which I loved her*, we need an explanation for this fact.

Indeed, I think that the primary explanation of how imperfections can be partial grounds of love in all three of the ways I have described is the same. Simply put, it is that I recognize something in Tricia that is similar to something in myself in each of these kinds of imperfection. Recognizing imperfection in another person that one knows well enables *trust* of that person, and close personal love presupposes some amount of trust. Recall Velleman's insightful point that when we love another person, we drop our emotional defenses and render ourselves vulnerable to them. Love is risky, and emotionally (sometimes even physically) *dangerous*, because we are dealing with imperfect persons. This is why when we love someone, we should feel that we are able to trust that person. Trust, if it is warranted, requires honest awareness of the person's character and attitudes.⁶⁸ In my view, mature and reasonable love can truly be possible only if we recognize and embrace some imperfections that we see in the other person.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ The point is not that a person is more trustworthy with her imperfections than she would be without them; the point is rather that trust requires seeing people (more or less) as they really are, and people really do have imperfections. This means that being able to see some of a person's imperfections is a necessary (though admittedly a minimally necessary) condition for seeing them as they are. Thanks to Richard Bett for pressing me on this.

⁶⁹ I am *not* claiming that love requires that we embrace *all* of what we take to be imperfections in our loved ones. Love should be compatible with believing that one's loved ones can and should do better. My point is only that when we love people in a mature way, we love them *in part* for (what we take to be) *some* imperfections.

It need not be the case that I share the *specific* imperfections I see and embrace in my loved ones. I may not share the particular attitude that I imagine giving rise to Tricia's comment. But the important point is that whichever of the above three ways of understanding the imperfection we choose, I can find analogous imperfections in myself. I am aware that there are apparent conflicts and areas of uncertainty in my own value system. For example, I see great disvalue in what I believe to be unethical food production practices, but I also see great value in experiencing the authentic local cuisine when traveling, and I realize that there may be a real conflict here—or at least that I don't have these things fully worked out for myself. I am also aware that I don't always properly live up to my own value commitments—all else being equal, I believe it is better to order the veggie burger than the cheeseburger, but I sometimes order the cheeseburger anyway. And I recognize that some of my values themselves may not be very good ones. I know that I probably have some unjustified prejudices that affect some of my particular judgments.

So, recognizing these imperfections in others, that are of kinds that we ourselves share, is *comforting*. It is not merely that they are comforting in the sense that they make us feel better about our own failings, and enable us to make (probably poor) excuses for them, however. The point is deeper than that. These sorts of imperfections are *deep features of human nature*, and honest recognition and acceptance of them is essential to close personal love. If I imagine a person who has a perfectly consistent, thoroughly worked out value system, with which she always acts in perfect accordance, and which consists of only the most admirable value commitments, I find it very difficult to imagine what it would be like to love such a person in a close personal sense. Indeed, I find it hard to think of such a being as a human being. If I do try to imagine viewing a human being as perfect in this way, I am thinking of being in a state of *infatuation*—which I earlier suggested was a matter of blindness to

imperfections. My point here is that overlooking or ignoring the very real imperfections of individual human beings renders actual, mature, close personal love for them *impossible*. I believe, and have been trying to show, that my account of close personal love is best suited to avoid this problem, because it can provide an explanation of what these imperfections are, and why they can play a role in our love.

In the remainder of this chapter, I wish to respond to a potential objection to my view—specifically, to my identification of a person with their character. I have been arguing throughout this chapter that the proper object of close personal love is a particular *person*, where I understand particular persons to be identical with, and individuated by, their characters. But, someone may ask, are characters (understood as structures of attitudes, or commitments to values) uniquely identifying in this way? This is the substitution problem that I mentioned earlier in the chapter. It is more familiar in the context of a theory according to which the sole grounds of love are a person's qualities. Kolodny expresses the problem in that context well:

If Jane's qualities are my reasons for loving her, then they are equally reasons for me loving anyone else with the same qualities. Insofar as my love for Jane is responsive to its reasons, therefore, it ought to accept anyone with the same qualities as a substitute. But an attitude that would accept just as well any *Doppelgänger* or swamp-Jane that happened along would scarcely count as love.⁷⁰⁷¹

⁷⁰ Kolodny, "Love as Valuing a Relationship," 140-141.

⁷¹ The idea here is reminiscent of the debate between the descriptive and causal theories of reference in the philosophy of language. For some interesting empirical work on people's intuitions about the irreplaceability of a loved one and their connections with this issue in the philosophy of language, see Christopher Grau and Cynthia L. S. Pury, "Attitudes Towards Reference and Replaceability," *Review of Philosophical Psychology* published online September 2013. I am grateful to Jon Hricko for drawing my attention to this connection.

Well, perhaps I need to be worried about being replaced by a *doppelgänger* with the same set of dispositions, attitudes and commitments as me.⁷² Perhaps in identifying a *person* with her *character*, I have in fact left my account vulnerable to the charge of not properly incorporating the Correct Object Requirement.

In fact, I think I can deal with the substitution objection, because there is an important difference between my view, which identifies a person with her character, and the quality theory, which allegedly identifies a person with a set of non-relational properties.⁷³ First, it seems to me that (even though the qualitatively identical *doppelgänger* scenario itself is rather unlikely), the possibility of finding someone with the same combination of dispositions, attitudes and commitments is extremely slim. But suppose, my objector may push, that there were such a person. Suppose someone were brainwashed by some malevolent genius to have precisely the same dispositions, attitudes and commitments as me. Why should I rather than this other person continue to be the object of my partner's love? The correct answer to this question, I think, appeals to how it is that persons come to have the particular characters (involving, essentially, commitments to values) that they do. If a person's character is an interpretation of, or expression of, a system of values, and if character is understood to be non-static (as, indeed, I think it should be) and in particular is open to changes brought about by relationships, it turns out to be *strictly* impossible for two people to have precisely the same character. The changes that occur in my partner's value

⁷² I am grateful to Josh McBee for pressing me on this point.

⁷³ I think that my view on this matter is quite similar to Neil Delaney's. See Delaney, "Romantic Love and Loving Commitment: Articulating a Modern Ideal," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 33 (1996): 339-356. Though Delaney describes his view as a version of the quality theory, he sees *relational* properties as being an important aspect of the ground of love. My view differs from Delaney's in that I think the structural notion of character, understood as a somewhat stable network of commitments to values, has more explanatory power than qualities. I think this is the case even if the qualities in question are understood to include relational properties, and even if we single out the properties that "individuals take to be at the core of their identity" as the properties that matter most for love (Delaney, "Romantic Love and Loving Commitment," 343).

system as a result of his relationship with me are particular to his relationship with me—he comes to value *this very relationship* very highly, for example.

The point here is that my understanding of character, specifically as a means of individuating or uniquely identifying persons, is not merely qualitative. Character is not simply a bundle of qualities or traits. It is a more unified structure with a particular *causal history*. What is missing in the *doppelgänger* scenario is the right causal connection between the lover and the beloved's substitute. My account effectively blocks the *doppelgänger* scenario because character—being an expression of a system of value commitments—presupposes a particular causal history.⁷⁴ The fact that the feeling of performing on stage is an element of my value system, for example, presupposes that I have had actual experiences in which I have had this feeling. It's worth returning briefly to Kolodny's view here, to compare his way of blocking the problematic scenario with mine.

For Kolodny, the objection cannot take hold because love is reduced to the valuing of a relationship, and so has the causal connection built in to it in an absolutely central way. My love for Joe is fixed to Joe in particular because *only he* shares the relevant causal history with me that amounts to our relationship. But I think that this reductive move comes at a high price—specifically, Kolodny is forced to explain *everything* about love in terms of relationships. My view, in contrast, can block the *doppelgänger* scenario while also incorporating the Attitudinal Requirement. It has the advantage of incorporating the causal point that Kolodny realizes is very useful, while at the same time construing love as responsive to the particularities of individuals. As I argued in section 4 of this chapter, I

⁷⁴ I should note that this point about causal history is particular to the notion of character that I am working with; it may not be an obvious part of an ordinary understanding of the notion of character.

think that understanding love as a response to a person's system of values as expressed through her character better explains common phenomena of love than does Kolodny's reductive account. And as I am now trying to show, it can do so while not succumbing to problems that Kolodny thinks only his view can avoid. This is because my view can explain the difference that relationships make to love without *reducing* love to the valuing of relationships.

On my view, love is grounded by a perception (though obviously not in a literal sense) of a person's value system as expressed through their character. Love then consists in a profound endorsement of that person's value system (as expressed through their character) specifically as a value system *for* that person. Relationships can make an immensely important difference here, since relationships—their growth, transformation, decay, and severance—significantly alter one's value system. Part of what is essential to a close relationship would seem to be a shared commitment, of roughly equal strength, to the value of the relationship. This is why love for a person with whom one is in a close relationship would *not* be indifferent to a substitution of a qualitatively similar *doppelgänger*.

The reader may wonder whether my inclusion of this historical element in my account is ad-hoc, given that I think love need not depend on the context of a relationship. Have I built into my own account an element of Kolodny's sort of view simply to avoid an objection?⁷⁵ I should explain how, on the contrary, I take this element to fit quite naturally into my account. On my view, the sort of account we give of the grounds of love will be the same, whether we are talking about the difference a relationship makes or not. The account

⁷⁵ Essentially, my concern here is to show that my view is more unified than the sort of "hybrid view" Kolodny mentions in "Love as Valuing a Relationship," footnote 10, 183-184.

will always be that love is an attitude we take toward the other person's system of values as expressed through his character. The fact that historical facts about particular relationships can have an impact on an individual's system of values means that my view can account for the difference a relationship makes quite naturally. Since my view of the grounds of love includes non-relational properties of a person as well as relational commitments (or facts about causal history) as different elements of a system of values, it provides a unified account that can block the substitution objection with its own resources.

One final point regarding the way my account recognizes the difference a relationship can make to love is worth mentioning. On my view, there is no deep difference between the attitude of friendship-type love, and the attitude of romantic love. Rather, the (very real) difference between friendship and romantic love is to be explained in terms of the relationships in question. When I choose to enter into a romantic relationship with someone, there are certain activities, attitudes and commitments that I take to be appropriate with respect to this person in virtue of the fact that we have entered into a relationship of this kind, or description. I expect, for example, sexual exclusivity, and the good of the relationship taking particularly high priority in our respective value systems.⁷⁶ While the relationship is not necessary for love to be in place, the relationship can make a significant difference to that love when it is in place. An implication of this is that when there is a close relationship in place, the nature of the relationship, along with the two parties' respective

⁷⁶ People can and do, of course, differ in their expectations of romantic relationships—and friendships, for that matter. These differences are plausibly to be explained in terms of variations in people's value systems. This is one especially clear case in which value systems that are not too divergent from one another would be a good indicator of romantic compatibility. This is a way in which *love* can be a reason for a *relationship*.

value systems, will determine which additional attitudes, actions, and commitments are appropriate. This is true of both relationships of friendship and romantic love.

Conclusion

To sum up, my account of close personal love is as follows. Close personal love is a response to a person's character, understood as an imperfect expression of an imperfect system of values. Character is a somewhat stable, but non-static structure of attitudes to things as being valuable. In order for love to be properly established, one must recognize patterns in the other's behavior and come to have some fairly good knowledge of what informs the other's tendencies and dispositions (specifically, the person's system of values). Loving a person does not require full identification of values; rather, it requires endorsement of the other's value system as one that is good for that person. In the context of a close personal relationship, there needs to be some alignment of, or fit between, the two parties' respective value systems, and one important aspect of this seems to be a shared commitment of roughly equal strength to the value of the relationship. It is possible, however, to love someone without the context of a close personal relationship—whether there was once such a close relationship or not. Examining what happens when we come to love, continue to love, and stop loving other people led us to see that we love people in part for their imperfections. When we appreciate certain imperfections in others, we recognize something that is similar to features of ourselves, and this enables trust. Warranted trust is what distinguishes reasonable from unreasonable risk in the emotional vulnerability of love. This

means that embracing our beloveds' imperfections is *essential* to admirable, mature close personal love.

I think that my account does better than the alternatives at satisfying the six desiderata I listed at the beginning of this chapter. Because love for a person is responsive to her particular character, it is appropriately *selective*. Characterizing love as responsive to a person's character, understood as an imperfect expression of an imperfect system of values, enables us to say that the object of love is the *person* rather than a collection of qualities or a bare capacity. I have shown how the *attitude* of love is distinct from *relationships*, and how some relationships are connected with it. In drawing attention to the importance of a value system—a set of final ends—in the object of love, I have distinguished close *personal* love from love of *non-persons* and have also, I think, imbued it with appropriate *maturity and depth*. Finally, I have explained how love can *come to be, continue, and decay*.

CHAPTER TWO

THE VALUE AND REASONS OF CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS FOR THEIR PARTICIPANTS

In the previous chapter, I gave the following analysis of close personal love. This love is a response to a person's particular character, understood as an imperfect expression of an imperfect system of values. Relationships grounded in close personal love involve a fair degree of alignment, and mutual endorsement, of the two parties' respective value systems. In the present chapter, I address the question of why relationships grounded on close personal love are so important to us. The love that characterizes close friendships and romantic relationships often seems to be a genuine reason for certain actions and attitudes. The question of why this is the case would seem to be especially pressing for my account, since I have construed love as a response to something that is *imperfect*, and that is recognized as such. To put it slightly differently, relationships of close personal love are often sources of agent-relative reasons, but there is an apparent puzzle as to why, especially given the central role of imperfection in the account. Further, the sorts of relationships under consideration (close friendships and romantic relationships) are typically entered into voluntarily, i.e. they are *selective*. But they nevertheless seem to give rise to reasons that are somehow binding, or no longer up to us. So, we now need an account of how it is that close personal relationships give rise to the reasons that they do. This is the task I take up in the present chapter.⁷⁷

To arrive at my account of the reasons generated by close personal relationships, I proceed in three stages. In the first section, I give a somewhat stipulative explication of my understanding of reasons and values. I survey some of the relevant terminology, and indicate my position in relation to those of Thomas Nagel, Joseph Raz, Richard Kraut, and T. M.

⁷⁷ It is worth noting that in the present chapter, I am concerned with the reasons that are generated by *relationships* of close personal love rather than reasons generated by the *attitude* of close personal love. While these will likely often coincide, since I take the attitude of close personal love and close personal relationships to be separable, there will be some differences. Again, my focus in the present chapter is primarily on the reasons generated by relationships of close personal love.

Scanlon. The view of reasons and values that emerges is, briefly, as follows. It is often true to say that something is good for some subject. This, I claim, is what it most obviously means for something to be valuable.⁷⁸ When something is valuable (so understood), it gives rise to reasons (at least for the subject for whom it is good) to respond to it appropriately. To respond appropriately to something that bears value for one is to appropriately value it. What is involved in appropriately valuing a thing will be informed by the sort of value that thing bears for the subject.⁷⁹ Given that this is my view, the structure of the rest of the chapter follows fairly naturally.

In the second section, I give an account of why close personal relationships are good for their participants. I give a fourfold classification of the value relationships bear for human beings: they are useful, they enable a distinctive kind of pleasure, they can enhance an individual's understanding of her own value system, and they enhance our individual agency. I then draw on this account, in the third section, to outline four classes of agent-relative reasons that are generated by relationships. Relationships give rise to reasons to favor loved ones in cases of need, to favor loved ones in the absence of any particular need, to increase the range of potential shared pleasures, and to take care of oneself. In each case, the reason is generated by some combination of the types of value discussed in the second section.

⁷⁸ I acknowledge that this understanding of the term 'valuable' is controversial. I offer some brief support for the claim below, with reference to Richard Kraut.

⁷⁹ So far, it can be assumed that I am referring only to agent-relative reasons. While I do give a brief explication of the distinction between agent-relative and agent-neutral reasons below, I do not fully engage with the issues raised by the distinction until a later chapter.

1. Value, Reasons, and the Relation Between Them

The first point of clarification that needs to be made concerns the sense of *reasons* under discussion here. Sometimes, we speak of ‘reasons’ in the sense of causal explanations for actions and events more generally. This is the notion of reasons at play if someone asks, “why did John slam the door?” and the ‘reason’ given for this behavior is that “he was in a fit of temper.”⁸⁰ Here, John’s emotional state is the ‘reason’ for his slamming the door in the sense that it provides some sort of causal story as to what led to John’s slamming of the door. These sorts of explanatory ‘reasons’ are to be contrasted with *normative* reasons, or reasons which purport to *justify* intentional actions and attitudes.⁸¹ It is with reasons in this second, normative sense that I am concerned in the present chapter.

As an example of a normative reason, suppose the answer to the question of why John slammed the door were instead “because he was being chased by a dangerous wild animal, and wanted a barrier between it and himself.” While this would still give an explanation of the event in question, it would do something more. Implicit in this answer is an answer to the question of why John thought it was a good idea to slam the door. The fact that he thought it would be bad for him if the vicious beast caught him, and that safety as soon as possible would be good for him, both explains the event (in part anyway) and goes some way toward *justifying* it.⁸² Ideally, for rational agents, explanatory and normative reasons

⁸⁰ Joseph Raz describes these explanatory reasons as “reasons why”—they explain why a state of affairs obtains, for example. See Raz, “Reasons: Explanatory and Normative,” in *From Normativity to Responsibility* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 16.

⁸¹ For a detailed treatment of the distinction between these two sorts of reasons, see Joseph Raz, “Reasons: Explanatory and Normative,” especially 16-20.

⁸² As already noted, Raz describes explanatory reasons as “reasons why”—see “Reasons: Explanatory and Normative,” 16. But as he notes, this point is not a grammatical one. I think it is illuminating to consider

will coincide.⁸³ But the conceptual distinction between them is important—it is because normative reasons purport to justify, rather than to merely explain, actions and attitudes that they feature in our evaluation of a person's intentional behavior.

So far, I have spoken somewhat loosely of reasons as 'facts,' 'considerations,' or 'explanations.' To give a more precise statement of what I take reasons to be, I need to take a detour via the concept of value. This is because I take it that reasons refer implicitly to values. Indeed, I think it is impossible to explain what reasons (in the normative sense) are without the concept of value. In this respect, my view differs from Scanlon's, according to which reasons are primary, and value statements are a kind of short-hand for saying there are reasons of certain kinds.⁸⁴ Indeed, the view I take of the relation between these two concepts may be seen to be the reverse of Scanlon's, in this particular respect. I take it that talk of *reasons* is a useful way to make concise statements about value. If something is a genuine reason for a particular action, it counts in favor of that action.⁸⁵ I take this to mean, roughly, that it is to some extent and in general *a good thing* for the considerations that constitute the reason to be produced, realized, satisfied, or otherwise appropriately responded to. Of course, there is a great deal more that might be said about the sense in which appropriately responding to reasons is 'a good thing'—but the point here is that I take the concept of a normative reason to involve *some* notion of value. Indeed, I take it that this is where a normative reason gets its normative character.

different interests we may have in asking "why"—this helps us to see the distinction between explanatory and normative reasons.

⁸³ As Raz says, all normative reasons must also be explanatory reasons. ("Reasons: Explanatory and Normative," 18.)

⁸⁴ See T. M. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1998), 17-107.

⁸⁵ In this wording, Scanlon and I agree. I disagree with him in that I do not think this is the *primary* way to explain what is going on; as I see it, the primary explanation is expressed in the sentence that follows.

By way of (very brief) argument for my view of the relation between reasons and values over Scanlon's, consider the following. At the very beginning of his chapter on reasons, Scanlon says:

I will take the idea of a reason as primitive. Any attempt to explain what it is to be a reason for something seems to me to lead back to the same idea: a consideration that counts in favor of it. "Counts in favor how?" one might ask. "By providing a reason for it" seems to be the only answer. So I will presuppose the idea of a reason, and presuppose that my readers are rational in the minimal but fundamental sense that I will presently explain.⁸⁶

Contrary to what Scanlon says here, it seems clear to me that a better answer to the question he mentions is defended by L. Nandi Theunissen. According to Theunissen's account, reasons have their ground in the relational property of being *good for* some subject.⁸⁷

Following this line of thought, a better answer to Scanlon's question of how a reason counts in favor of something might be "by being good for the agent." For example, if the question is how health might be a reason for eating broccoli, the answer would be because health is good for the agent. There is of course a further explanation to be given of why health is good for the agent, but it seems to me that this further explanation will make reference to other *values* rather than leading back to the concept of a reason. (Health enables the agent to reach his goals, to be fairly comfortable, to live a long life, and so on—and all of these things might constitute reasons for various actions or attitudes because *they* are good for the agent.) Note that being good *for the agent* is not the only way that reasons might implicitly refer to values. To take another example, if the question is how a stranger's appointment could be a

⁸⁶ Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, 17.

⁸⁷ Theunissen, "The Normativity of *Good For*," (manuscript.)

reason for me to give her directions as accurately and quickly as possible, the answer would be because it is good for the stranger to get to her appointment on time.⁸⁸

For now, I leave it open as to whether it might ever be true to say that something is absolutely good, or good simpliciter.⁸⁹ I do not think I need to take a stand on this issue for the purposes of the present issue; all I need is for it sometimes to be true that something is good for some subject. This is because my concern in the present chapter is only with the ways in which relationships can be good, and reason-giving, for their participants. I take it to be true that sometimes things *are* in fact good for subjects, and that this often explains the reasons we have. Despite my not taking a stand on whether or not there is such a property as absolute goodness, I believe I am largely in agreement with both Thomas Nagel and Richard Kraut on the way that value for a subject gives rise to reasons (and indeed explains reasons). Though there are substantial differences between the views of Kraut and Nagel, a point of convergence between their two views and mine is this: some things are good (or bad) for some subjects. Innocent pleasure and unnecessary pain might be helpful examples. The fact that these things are sometimes good (or bad) for some subjects makes it the case that some agents have reasons to do certain things.⁹⁰ This, it seems to me, is an explanation

⁸⁸ For a compelling argument in defense of the view that reasons are explicable only with reference to values, see Joseph Raz, "Agency, Reason, and the Good," in *Engaging Reason: On the Theory of Value and Action* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 22-45. As he puts it: "The difficulty in explaining the eligibility of actions in ways other than by making reference to good-making qualities may make one doubt the objection. But is it just failure of imagination which makes the classical approach seem the only coherent account to have? I do not think so. The problem is of finding conceptual room for an alternative" ("Agency, Reason, and the Good," 28.)

⁸⁹ For an argument that there is no such thing as absolute goodness, or goodness simpliciter, see Richard Kraut, *Against Absolute Goodness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁹⁰ See, for example, Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 154 and Kraut, *Against Absolute Goodness*, 7: "...that something is good *for* you, or *for* someone else, is, of course, often an excellent reason for you to value it."

of how reasons ‘count in favor’ of actions or attitudes that does not itself refer to the concept of a reason.

I am now in a position to state more precisely what I take normative reasons to be. In this, I follow Raz in construing reasons as *facts*.⁹¹ Normative reasons in particular are facts about *value*. An example of such a fact is that it is good for my cat to drink water every day. This fact is a *reason* (in the normative sense) for me to give him fresh water every day. The reason is *normative* because it accounts for the fact that complying with it is favored, or recommended.⁹² That is, certain reasons (the normative ones) can function as explanations (and so can also be explanatory reasons) only because they have normative force. I have been suggesting that this normative force comes from *values*. It is because normative reasons are facts about values that they purport to justify intentional actions and attitudes. The notion that facts can be about values should not be taken as alarming. I think Nagel makes the point quite well when he says:

The view that values are real is not the view that they are real occult entities or properties, but that they are real values: that our claims about values and about what people have reason to do may be true or false independently of our beliefs and inclinations.⁹³

It seems to me that being good for some subject is an obvious and not too controversial way for something to be valuable. As already stated, I leave it open whether there is another, non-relational way for something to be valuable. I do wish to point out, however, that relational goodness, or goodness for some subject, is not limited to

⁹¹ Raz, “Reasons: Explanatory and Normative,” 18.

⁹² In “Agency, Reason, and the Good,” Raz describes the normative force of reasons as “the fact that failure to conform to them is a fault” (28).

⁹³ Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*, 144.

instrumental value. Kraut makes this point convincingly in relation to the example that smoking is bad for some people: as he explains it, smoking is presumably bad for some people because of its effects. Therefore, it is instrumentally bad. But for this to be the case, one of those effects (not necessarily immediate) must be *non-instrumentally* bad. But it still seems plausible to construe this badness as badness *for* the people for whom smoking is (instrumentally) bad.⁹⁴ Additionally, something can be partly *constitutive* of a good life for an individual, and so good *for* that individual, while not leading to something else that is valuable.

To sum up my view of reasons, values, and the relation between them, I take reasons to be fact about values. I assume that it is sometimes true that some things are good for some subjects, and this is what I mean by saying that there can be facts about values. These facts make it the case that agents have normative reasons to do things, to refrain from doing things, to hold attitudes, to revise attitudes, and so on. There is one final terminological distinction to note before I can move on to the next section. I have said that I am concerned only with *agent-relative* reasons in the present chapter. The distinction between agent-relative and agent-neutral reasons is familiar from detailed discussions by Thomas Nagel and Derek Parfit.⁹⁵ Nagel characterizes agent-neutral reasons as having “a general form which does not include an essential reference to the person who has it.”⁹⁶ In contrast, Nagel says that an agent-relative reason will have a general form that *does* essentially include a reference to the agent.⁹⁷ An example of an agent-neutral reason might be the reason to promote overall

⁹⁴ Kraut, *Against Absolute Goodness*, 34.

⁹⁵ See Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*, 152-188 and Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), especially 140-148.

⁹⁶ Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*, 152.

⁹⁷ Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*, 153.

utility, if utilitarianism is true. Under this assumption, *there is reason to perform actions that promote utility*. This reason makes no essential reference to any particular agent. In contrast, I have a reason to make sure my cat, Cole, has fresh water every day. This reason does make an essential reference to me (two, in fact)—*I* rather than anyone else have reason to give *my* cat fresh water every day.

I take up the distinction between agent-neutral and agent-relative reasons, and the implications the value of relationships might have for it, in the next chapter. In the present chapter, I investigate only the latter class. I therefore say no more about the distinction here. I turn now to considering the nature of the value that close personal relationships have for their participants—why are they good for us?

2. The Value of Close Personal Relationships

One way in which relationships are good for us is that they are, of course, useful. We are all better off if we have friends we can call on to help us move, to take care of our cats when we are away, to introduce us to people that might be good to meet, and so on. A very important part of the usefulness of relationships is that they are a great source of pleasure, and probably could not be substituted with anything else for the same effect. The thought of a life without friends is positively miserable, while even quite unpleasant experiences can be rendered less unpleasant by the company of friends. This is to say, close personal relationships can be causes of pleasure (or the lessening of pain). But relationships that are based entirely on their aptness for producing pleasure or reducing pain would likely be rather superficial. If this were the nature of the relationship, it would in fact seem to be reduced to

a relationship based on usefulness—the relationship would be useful for producing or maintaining a certain level of subjective well-being. In other words, the production or maintenance of pleasure might be one species of the usefulness of relationships.

While we certainly should not overlook the value of friendships and other relationships as useful (and I take this to include their role in the production or maintenance of pleasure), usefulness on its own would seem to be a rather shallow reason for imbuing personal relationships with the importance that we do. Note, for example, that it seems antithetical to the spirit of friendship to speak of *using* one's friends.⁹⁸ Aristotle was surely right to distinguish friendships based on usefulness from friendships based on the pleasant and friendships based on the good.⁹⁹ The first point to note is that close personal relationships have a rather special role in the pleasantness of one's life that could not be easily filled by something else, and this role is not a simply causal, or productive one.¹⁰⁰ For example, the pleasantness of spending time with a friend with a sense of humor is importantly different from the pleasantness of watching a comedian. Or, to take another example, the pleasantness of conversation with a loved one over dinner is quite different from reading over dinner, even if the reading material and its author are quite fascinating. If

⁹⁸ Raz, in a somewhat different context, makes the point that taking an instrumental attitude towards one's friends would be self-defeating. ("The Amoralist," in *Engaging Reason: On the Theory of Value and Action*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 273-302.) I am grateful to Nandi Theunissen for drawing my attention to the relevance of the point to the present context.

⁹⁹ See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Bk VIII, for his distinction between the three types and corresponding bases of friendship: the useful, the pleasant, and the good. At 1156a14-21, he says that among these three types, both of the first two are only friendships "incidentally," suggesting that only the third meets the mark of true friendship. However, some of what he says about the pleasant in relation to the good later on in this book and the next suggests that he sees the pleasant (and its corresponding friendship) as more genuinely important to a good life. I return to this point below.

¹⁰⁰ This is why I treat the causal role of relationships in relation to pleasure along with usefulness. I think there is a deeper point to be made about relationships and pleasure than the causal one. I think that this may have been behind Aristotle's distinguishing friendships based on the pleasant from friendships based on the useful as well.

the role of the relationship is to be understood as simply productive of pleasure, this should be surprising. Supposing the comedian is much wittier than my friend, and the author of my book has much more engrossing stories to tell than my partner, surely the comedian's show and the book should be preferable (simply in terms of pleasantness) to the company of my loved ones.

That this is not how things in fact are is explained by the fact that the role of close personal relationships in relation to pleasure is not simply, or entirely, one of cause to effect. Rather, the company of a friend or loved one is partly *constitutive* of the pleasantness of an experience. I take this to be a kernel of truth in what Robert Nozick says about relationships (and friendship in particular) in *The Examined Life*: that the essence of friendship is *sharing*.¹⁰¹ As he puts it, "a relationship is a friendship to the extent that it shares activities for no further purpose than the sharing of them."¹⁰² Often, what makes a meal, a drink, or an evening of entertainment most pleasant is *that it is shared*. That the pleasantness of a shared meal *depends* in large part on its being shared explains why the meal spent in the "company" of a good book would be a poor substitute, in terms of pleasantness, for the shared meal, no matter how good the book is.

The point here is that the pleasantness of a shared experience is of a different order than the pleasantness of some other experience, not that shared experiences always trump good books. It is also worth noting that it is not simply the fact that the experience is shared that is important, but that it is shared with the particular person with whom you have a relationship. To put the point another way, the (pleasure) value of the shared meal is not

¹⁰¹ Robert Nozick, "Love's Bond," in *The Examined Life* (New York: Touchstone, 1990) 68-86, especially 82-3.

¹⁰² Nozick, "Love's Bond," 83.

equal to the sum of the value of the meal itself and the value of the stories my dinner partner tells, for example.¹⁰³ The difference in the pleasantness is not one of degree; the sharing of a meal, for example, makes the meal take on a quite different character as an experience. The sharedness of the experience changes the nature of the experience, and the character of its pleasantness.¹⁰⁴

These reflections shed light, I believe, on Aristotle's initially somewhat puzzling remarks to the effect that even though friendships that have the pleasant as their basis are friendships only incidentally (just like friendships based on the useful), pleasantness will be an important part of friendships that are based on the good (or true friendships).¹⁰⁵ The point is that there is a difference between friendships that are valued merely for the sake of the pleasure they produce or maintain, and friendships that are valued in part for the sake of the pleasantness of the shared experiences they facilitate. One of the respects in which Aristotle distinguishes "incidental" from "complete" friendships is that in the latter case, the friends are loved because of themselves, whereas in the former case, the friends are loved because of the pleasure or usefulness they bring.¹⁰⁶ As I see it, this parallels the distinction between valuing a friend because of the pleasure she produces and valuing the special

¹⁰³ The altered character of the experience that results from its being shared might thus be compared to G. E. Moore's notion of an "organic unity." See G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (New York: Barnes & Noble Publishing, 2005), especially 27-37.

¹⁰⁴ I should note that Nozick would no doubt take issue with what may look like a reduction of the value of sharing to pleasure. In response, I note that the point I am making does not depend on a reduction of this sort (nor would I want to perform one). The point that an important part of the value of sharing is its distinctive variety of pleasantness is compatible with the value of sharing not being *wholly* explained in terms of pleasantness. Indeed, part of the value of the sharing seems to lie in its capacity to significantly alter the character of a pleasant (or, for that matter, painful) experience.

¹⁰⁵ See, for example, 1158a22-25: "...and while the blessedly happy have no need of useful friends, they do need pleasant ones; for on the one hand they wish to have people with whom to share their lives, and on the other the painful is something that people tolerate for a short time, but no one would put up with it on a continuing basis—no one would put up even with the good itself, if it were painful to him."

¹⁰⁶ See 1156a14-21 and 1156b7-14, for example.

pleasantness that is partly constituted by, and indeed transformed by, the sharing of experiences with a particular person.

So, we have seen that close personal relationships are valuable in two ways so far. First, they are useful (and I take this to include their aptness for the production or maintenance of pleasure). Second, given that they are often marked by shared experiences, they are distinctively pleasant—pleasant in a way that is plausibly partly constitutive of personal well-being. More carefully, they have the capacity to transform the character of pleasant experiences in virtue of the sharedness of the experiences they facilitate. These on their own are significant ways for something to be valuable. I say this to forestall a potential objection—the objection that relationships, as I have so far construed them, are of merely instrumental value. Even if something is only instrumentally valuable, it is still genuinely and importantly valuable if it is instrumental in bringing about something which itself is genuinely valuable. Consider water, which may be said to be “merely” instrumentally valuable, but without which there would be no life as we know it.¹⁰⁷ If something is instrumental in serving an end that lacks genuine value, then it is *merely instrumental*, rather than being instrumentally *valuable*. That is to say, the qualifier “merely” is misleading when attached to the phrase “instrumentally valuable.” To the extent that the end is genuinely valuable, instrumentally valuable goods are genuinely valuable. It is surely clear that some ends which are served by relationships are genuinely valuable, so even if the value of relationships were only instrumental, their value would be significant and genuine.

Moreover, it is not the case that instrumental value is the only sort of value that relationships have. As we have seen, there is a distinction between the (pleasure) value of

¹⁰⁷ I am indebted and grateful to Nandi Theunissen for this example.

relationships as *sources* or *producers* of pleasure and the distinctive pleasantness that relationships and their associated activities can be partly constitutive of. But beyond the usefulness and pleasantness of relationships, they have value as irreducible components of good lives for human beings. Our close relationships with others are not always marked by usefulness or pleasantness, but they remain valuable. To put it another way, our relationships often remain valuable even when they do not lead to a greater balance of utility over disutility or pleasure over pain. One plausible way to explain the non-instrumental value of relationships, as I have been suggesting, is to see them as important components of a good life for a human being. It remains, then, to explain *why* relationships constitute valuable components of a good life for a human being. What would be amiss without them?

Consider what is lacking from a seemingly self-sufficient person's life—let's call him Scrooge.¹⁰⁸ Scrooge is self-sufficient in the sense that he certainly has enough wealth to last the rest of his life and to secure any services or goods he may desire. His health is good, and if that changes, he is sure to be able to receive adequate medical care. If there are any tasks he may have reason to perform but is unable to perform on his own, he has robots to take care of them for him. The only thing he doesn't have is close personal relationships. One thing that seems to be missing from Scrooge's life is someone with intimate knowledge of his value system; someone with whom he might talk through personal dilemmas, for example. Perhaps a situation arises in which he has to choose between attending a boxing match he is particularly excited about and his favorite annual derby that is happening at the

¹⁰⁸ The Scrooge example is intentionally somewhat ridiculous and caricature-like for the sake of clarity at this point. As I shall show, however, the points I aim to establish are not dependent on this version of the example.

same time. He feels genuinely torn between these two events and doesn't know what to do.¹⁰⁹

If Scrooge had a friend with whom he could talk through his dilemma, his decision may be made easier in several ways. A friend might, for example, tell Scrooge that he himself will be attending the derby, thus providing Scrooge with an additional reason to attend the derby, but not the boxing match. (As explained above, the sharedness of the experience would alter its character.) Or his friend, with the intimate knowledge of Scrooge's value system that he would have, might be able to point out some nuances in some of Scrooge's values that he himself had been blind to. Perhaps, on careful reflection, Scrooge would really prefer to support an institution that leads to brain injuries in human beings rather than one that does not, and so would really prefer to attend the boxing match. His friend may be able to help him see this. Scrooge's (imagined) friend might be able to help him make discoveries about the relations between his various value commitments, and so facilitate his understanding of his own value system.¹¹⁰

But another way in which Scrooge's imagined friend might be able to help in this situation would be to point out a *problem* in Scrooge's value system, and help Scrooge to improve on it. For example, if Scrooge had a friend, the friend might point out that there is an inconsistency between Scrooge's enjoyment of the brain injuries of others (perhaps they

¹⁰⁹ I intend this example to be understood as a case in which the agent is uncertain about the relationships between values that he holds. It is not merely that he is unsure how to reach a decision about what he should do *given* his values; rather, it is that he is not sure which of two values is more important to him. It is in trying to reach a decision about what to do that the issue arises for him, but the real problem is that he doesn't know how to balance two elements of his value system. In other words, the problem is intended to be one about reasoning about *ends*.

¹¹⁰ Something like this is probably what Aristotle meant by describing a friend as a second self. See for example NE Bk IX:4 1166a30-33.

are interesting and amusing to him) and his belief that intelligence is a good thing.¹¹¹ Once this was pointed out to him, perhaps Scrooge would realize that since he in fact values intelligence more than small amusements, he should not after all attend the boxing match. He may even realize that because he values intelligence *so* much, he should spend his evening doing something entirely different from either of the two activities he was initially struggling to choose between. A friend could offer a different perspective on the situation that Scrooge confronts—a perspective that is well informed about, or familiar with, Scrooge’s own particular values. And it could even be that this fresh perspective could help Scrooge to hone or perfect his own value system. Simply put, the presence of a friend could facilitate enhanced practical reasoning.

Of course, the example as I have presented it is rather like a caricature. I have made it so in order to hopefully give a clear illustration of the point I am trying to make; I do not think my argument depends on this caricature-like example. The point is that friendship (as well as other close personal relationships) is valuable in part because it can facilitate enhanced practical reasoning. It is especially suited to doing this because our friends, knowing us as they do, can help us achieve better understanding of our own values, and may be able to help us develop and improve our value systems. To see that this is the case even for much less obviously imperfect individuals, consider the following parallel example.

¹¹¹ The particular flaw that is pointed out here is simply one of inconsistency between particular attitudes that Scrooge in fact holds. Of course, it is likely the case that some of the attitudes Scrooge holds are ones that he should *not* hold. I think that our friends’ intimate knowledge of our value systems puts them in especially good positions to help us better understand our ‘internal’ values, but they may also be able to help us internalize better values than the ones we currently hold. Indeed, the presence of a co-deliberator would seem to be especially suited to helping one become aware of new reasons one was previously blind to. I address this point more thoroughly in the next chapter.

Gillian is a reasonably happy and comfortable loner who has, among her interests, a passion for a particular rock band and a commitment to environmentalism. Gillian might be trying to decide whether to attend a concert by the rock band or a protest organized by her environmentalist organization. Something that a friend might contribute to Gillian's situation might be to point out that the rock band's performance involves elements that are antithetical to the environmentalist cause. Suppose that Gillian's passion for the rock band constitutes a sort of 'blind spot' in her deliberation. It seems that this is just the sort of case in which it is good to have a friend to offer a different perspective on one's value system—specifically a different perspective that is nevertheless well acquainted with, and sensitive to, the particularities of one's system of values. Gillian's friend could help her to see that attending the environmentalist protest would be more in line with Gillian's own values and so facilitate her enhanced practical reasoning.¹¹²

In addition to enhanced practical reasoning, there is another important good that I think friendship might add to Scrooge's, or Gillian's, life. I believe Aristotle gives us a clue here, in the opening lines of *NE* Bk VIII:

After these subjects, it will be appropriate to discuss friendship, since friendship is a kind of excellence, or goes along with excellence, and furthermore is very necessary for living. For no one would choose to live without friends, even if he had all the other good things; for even the wealthy or those who rule over or dominate others are thought to need friends

¹¹² As in the case of Scrooge, this is an example of Gillian's friend helping her to better understand her own internal values. But note that Gillian's friend is also especially well positioned, knowing Gillian as she does, to help Gillian to become aware of reasons or values of which she was previously unaware. In both the case of Scrooge and the case of Gillian, the focus of the example has been on better understanding internal nuances of one's value system. But it should be clear that in both cases, the friend stands to help the agent significantly develop and expand his or her own value system beyond its present constitution.

more than anything—*since what use would such prosperity be if they were deprived of the possibility of beneficence, which occurs most, and is most to be praised, in relation to friends?*¹¹³

Perhaps Aristotle is making reference to some virtue which we no longer recognize as especially important—such as magnificence. But I think there is an important insight in the part of the quote I have italicized above: the opportunity to practice beneficence is a great good that our friends afford us. At times, Aristotle makes some initially confusing remarks about how even the blessedly happy or self-sufficient are in great need of friends. This is puzzling, because surely the very meaning of ‘self-sufficient’ is to *not* need anything. Aristotle seems to think that friendship, especially in its capacity to afford an agent opportunities for a special kind of beneficence, is a great good even for those who would seem to be in need of nothing.¹¹⁴ The opportunity for beneficence is the gift for the person who has everything, we might say. Something that would be missing from a life devoid of close personal relationships would be the opportunity to practice a particular kind of beneficence, and this opportunity is a great gift we receive from our friends and loved ones. This gift facilitates the living of a good life for a human being in a unique and important way.

Without close personal relationships, Scrooge’s life lacks many opportunities to be in a position to offer a certain kind of help or beneficence. One such opportunity that is closed off to Scrooge is the opportunity to *be* the friend who facilitates enhanced practical reasoning in the way we imagined a friend might have helped him in the previous example. *Being able to* offer help or favors is a great good that is in large part facilitated by the context of close personal relationships. Without such relationships, whole avenues of opportunity for

¹¹³ Aristotle, *NE* VIII.1 1155a3-10. Emphasis added.

¹¹⁴ See *NE* IX.9 1169b10-14: “And if it is more characteristic of a friend to do good than to receive it, and characteristic of the good person, and of excellence, to bestow benefits on others, and if it is finer to do good to friends than to strangers, *the person of excellence will need people to receive benefits from him.*” Emphasis added.

beneficence are closed off to Scrooge. To the extent that Gillian's life lacks close personal relationships, the same point applies to her.

One may wonder why the context of a relationship is important here, even if it is granted that the opportunity to act beneficently is a good for the agent. There are plenty of strangers towards whom we could be beneficent; why does Scrooge need friends when there are so many potential beneficiaries of his charity? One reason for this is that there seems to be something special about the combination of beneficence and *reciprocity*. It is of course good to be beneficent toward strangers, to make donations to charity organizations, to offer anonymous assistance, and so on. I do not mean to detract from the value of such actions. But there nevertheless seems to be something special about the possibility of *reciprocal beneficence* in the context of a close personal relationship. It is a special sort of good when one's friend asks one for a favor after offering favors in the past—this opportunity to reciprocate is something that Scrooge is not afforded. Similarly, without close personal relationships, the opportunity for this particular kind of beneficence is missing from Gillian's life even if she is quite active in charity organizations. The point Aristotle is making, I believe, is that even if we *were* self-sufficient (as we might imagine Scrooge is), we would still need friends—to be the recipients of our beneficence. Moreover, I suggest, it is important that these beneficiaries are *friends* (or other loved ones) because it is only then that we get the special opportunity of reciprocal beneficence. Even a generous, charity-supporting Scrooge would need friends, or he would be missing out on the good of reciprocity together with beneficence.

There is a subtle, but, I think, interesting and important point in the above argument. As I understand it, Aristotle's view is basically that even if a person were self-sufficient, he

would have need of friends as recipients of his beneficence. But, as I think the hypothetical case of an anonymously charitable Scrooge suggests, the fact that we are *not* self-sufficient is itself an important part of why we need friends *in particular* as recipients of our beneficence. I have suggested that the explanation of this is that the context of a relationship allows for *reciprocity* together with beneficence. But notice that reciprocity would seem to *imply* non-self-sufficiency. What would Scrooge be able to reciprocate if no one had ever done him any favors, self-sufficient as we are imagining him to be? It looks, then, as if a more accurate statement than the one I have attributed to Aristotle would be that *because* we are not and can never be self-sufficient, we need friends and other close relationships.¹¹⁵ To put it differently, and perhaps in a way that better exhibits why I take this point to be interesting and subtle, it is because our friends and loved ones are not self-sufficient that *we* need *them*.

A situation Scrooge will never find himself in is one in which another person has shown him some particular vulnerability and asked for help that they think he is particularly well-suited to give. The help in question need not be of the kind described in the previous example, where Scrooge's friend helps him deliberate about how to resolve a dilemma. But in general, our friends are particularly well positioned to help us in ways that no one else can, and this is because we show them vulnerabilities that we do not show to others.¹¹⁶ The point is that mutual help and beneficence is a great good. Having a relationship with someone who is always ready and willing to help one is of course good, but without the possibility of returning the favor, the relationship would be somewhat limited. The good of *being able to* offer help or favors that one is especially well positioned to offer is unattainable without the

¹¹⁵ This is my view, not Aristotle's.

¹¹⁶ Recall, also, Gillian's 'blind spot' due to her passion for the rock band. Only a friend, or someone intimately acquainted with Gillian's values would be able to help her see that she had this blind spot.

context of a close personal relationship. This is because it requires the cooperation of a beneficiary in the specific sense of showing vulnerability. The context of a close personal relationship, we might say, therefore expands the potential area of our agency—it allows us to practice a certain kind of beneficence. This in turn affords us a unique opportunity to develop an important capacity in ourselves.

This point about non-self-sufficiency, or vulnerability, and its importance for close personal relationships recalls one of my central claims in the previous chapter—namely, that we love people in part for their imperfections. On the one hand, these imperfections (lack of self-sufficiency or vulnerability, for example) are part of what it is to be human, and so loving a fellow human being must involve at least a recognition and acceptance of their imperfections. But, on the other hand, the loved one’s imperfections are in fact a part of the ground of our love; a willing admission of non-self-sufficiency or vulnerability opens up a whole new avenue of opportunities for the lover. A properly good life for a human being seems to require close personal relationships because such relationships create a framework within which we are able to help one another, or do good things for another, in a particularly meaningful way. So, part of the explanation for why personal relationships are valuable is that *I*, as one participant am imperfect and vulnerable. But equally, and perhaps more interestingly, another part of the explanation is that the relationship is good for me because the *other* participant is imperfect and vulnerable. Only within a relationship with such a being is a certain kind of good—the good of *reciprocal beneficence*—attainable for me.

When you ask me for help—whether it be practical or more abstract (such as advice), you willingly admit some kind of vulnerability, and present me with the opportunity to mitigate it. You present me with the opportunity to *actively contribute* to our relationship, or

to put my feelings of love for you into practice. You allow me the opportunity to actually *relate* with you. A friend who never asks one for help, or who never allows her friend to help her, does her friend and their relationship a disservice. The friendship is thereby prevented from blossoming or bearing fruit; it is stifled. The opportunity to actively engage with, and reciprocally contribute to the good of, another human being explains in large part why close personal relationships are so valuable.

To sum up the results of this section, we have a fourfold explanation of the value of close personal relationships. First, relationships are valuable because they have utility. This includes, but is not limited to, the fact that relationships can often be sources of pleasure or reducers of pain. Second, relationships have the capacity to enable a distinctive and unique sort of pleasantness that we take to be an important good—the distinctive pleasantness of shared experiences. Third, one’s close personal relationships can facilitate a deeper self-understanding and so enhance one’s practical reasoning. Fourth, close personal relationships are responsible for special opportunities for reciprocal beneficence, and so expand the scope of our agency. Now that we have this explanation on hand, we can consider some of the particular *reasons* that are generated by these valuable relationships. In the section that follows, I explore what it means to properly value a close personal relationship that has the sort of fourfold value I have been discussing.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ I should note that although there are four kinds of value in the present section, and four classes of reasons in the following section, this is coincidental. That is, the reader should not expect a one-to-one mapping of values on to reasons. As I see it, each of the classes of reasons is explained by some combination of the kinds of value just discussed.

3. The Reasons Relationships Generate for Their Participants

In this section, I outline what I take to be four important classes of reasons that are generated by valuable relationships. I take these reasons to be so generated because they are in fact what it is to properly value such relationships, or to treat bearers of the sort of value in question appropriately. Before I get to the four classes I think are most important, I want to mention and set aside two relatively uninteresting senses in which relationships may give rise to reasons. First, the partners in a marriage or other long-term explicitly monogamous relationship have reasons to be faithful to one another for as long as the relationship exists. The most general reason for this, however, has to do with the reasons there are for keeping promises or honoring commitments. There is a promise, either explicit or implicit, involved in this kind of relationship, which provides the partners with some reason to be faithful *even if the relationship itself ceases to be valuable*.¹¹⁸¹¹⁹ In other words, the reason here is not directly generated by the value of the relationship. My interest is in the reasons that are generated by the relationships as bearers of a distinctive sort of value. I mention this case merely to set

¹¹⁸ The sort of case I have in mind is one where the relationship is still in place, but is no longer valuable for the participants in the way it once was. We can imagine a couple who live together, and who spend a great deal of time together, and who perhaps even depend on one another in some ways. But whereas their interactions were once marked by a deep appreciation of one another and a mutual endorsement of one another's value systems, their interactions are now marked by annoyance, resentment, and perhaps disdain. They no longer appreciate one another, and neither endorses the other's value system (perhaps one or both of them has changed substantially over the years). It seems to me that the way to describe this situation is as one in which there is a *relationship*—including a pattern of typical interactions and shared history—but it may have lost its *value*. In such a case, there may be no reasons that are generated by the value of the relationship (since, by hypothesis, it has none) but given that the partners made a commitment to be monogamous with one another, there is *some* reason for them each to honor the commitment until the relationship in its current form comes to an end.

¹¹⁹ For some very interesting points about the best reasons for fidelity in a committed, monogamous relationship, see Neil Delaney, "What Romance Could Not Be," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 84 (2010): 589-598. Delaney suggests (though he doesn't put it in precisely these terms) that the value of the relationship provides the strongest reason for honoring one's commitment, though there is a distinct reason (generated by the commitment itself) that holds independently.

aside the reasons that are generated by promises, contracts, commitments, and the like; these reasons are not interestingly unique to, or distinctive of, relationships of close personal love.

Second, given that we typically spend more time with our friends and loved ones than we do with other people, we generally have more opportunities to be beneficent or kind to our friends and loved ones than we do to others. The mere fact that I am more likely to witness Rachel's need than that of a person I rarely see means that I will have more reasons to help *her* rather than many other people. But the reason as described here need have nothing to do with the value of our relationship. It is rather a matter of being conveniently situated to direct my kindness toward Rachel rather than toward someone with whom I rarely interact. Like the previous example, I mention this case simply to set it aside. The reasons that arise from the *value* of a close personal relationship are different from reasons of convenient situation.¹²⁰ I can now turn to the reasons that do seem to be generated by the value of relationships of close personal love.

The first sort of reason that *does* seem to arise from the value of a relationship is a reason to *favor one's loved ones over others in cases of need*. Suppose my friend Rachel and a stranger are both in mortal peril, and I am the only one around to help them. Moreover, the situation is such that I can only help one of them. Although there is surely a case to be made that I have some (probably strong) reason to help each of them, I am of course going to rush to Rachel's aid rather than the stranger's. While this may be justifiable in relation to the reasons I have to help each of them by the fact that I can only help one of them, to attempt this sort

¹²⁰ Compare the reasons you may have to do your grocery shopping at the nearest grocery store with the reasons you have to do your shopping at a grocery store of which you are particularly fond, whether or not it is conveniently close by.

of justification misses an important point.¹²¹ That point is that there are *genuine reasons* for me to favor Rachel in this situation over and above the more general reasons that I have to help anyone in such a situation (and so to help each of them in this situation). It is not merely that it is *acceptable* for me to choose Rachel; I *should* choose Rachel, and the reason is simply that *she is my friend*. Our relationship of friendship constitutes sufficient reason for me to choose Rachel. More carefully, the value of our friendship makes it the case that I should choose Rachel.¹²² Any attempt to justify this choice by appealing to considerations other than our friendship would be misguided; it would indicate that I improperly valued the relationship.¹²³

Considering this case shows that part of what it is to properly value one's close personal relationships is to have a disposition to favor one's loved ones over others, and to be guided in one's actions by this disposition. This can be explained in part by reference to the utility and distinctive pleasantness of sharing that comes with such relationships. Part of the explanation is also that I am responding to the particular value that I see in Rachel as the person she is—the person I have come to love. But it seems that the bulk of the explanatory work here is done by considerations of *reciprocity*, and in particular, the value of reciprocal beneficence. Were someone to ask me to justify my choosing Rachel in the case described, a

¹²¹ This case is meant to mirror what I take to be the salient features of the example Bernard Williams made famous in "Persons, Character and Morality," in *Moral Luck*, 1-19 at 17. I have changed the presentation of the case somewhat, however, to avoid what seem to me to be common confusions that arise in discussion of this case. I have also decided to change the presentation of the case in order to distance myself from Williams, since I do not think the point I am making is *identical* to the one he intended, though it is similar. At any rate, disagreement about how to understand Williams's case is rampant in the literature. Rather than delving into that can of worms, I have chosen to present a different, though similar, example to be considered independently. I return to Williams's own case and responses to it in Chapter 4 below.

¹²² This is not to say, of course, that there could not be some other reason to choose the other person, nor is it to say that the value of my friendship will always constitute the most salient reason in such cases. It is merely to say that, all else being equal, our friendship generates a genuine reason for me to choose Rachel, and if I failed to do so, criticism of me would be appropriate.

¹²³ As Samuel Scheffler says, "To value one's relationships is to treat them as reason-giving." (Scheffler, "Morality and Reasonable Partiality," in *Equality & Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 41-75 at 48.)

natural answer would seem to be, “she would have done the same for me.” I do not mean to suggest that the reason I have to choose Rachel is explained by, and dependent on, some kind of *quid pro quo* consideration. Rather, what I think the “she would have done the same for me” response really signals is the deep goodness of reciprocity and beneficence that our relationship allows and facilitates. Rather than it being a sort of contractual *expectation* that Rachel would do the same for me, what I think the “she would have done the same for me” response really refers to is the value of the reciprocity that is a large part of our relationship, and the recognition that there are certain actions that are appropriate ways to honor that reciprocity. In extreme cases, laying down one’s life for a friend might be the most appropriate way to honor the value of the friendship, and this does not depend on the belief that one’s friend would do the same if the situation were reversed.

Beyond beneficence in the case of need, a second class of reasons that are generated by the value of close personal relationships can also be described as reasons to *favor* loved ones over others. In this second class, however, the favoring takes the form of beneficence in the absence of any particular need.¹²⁴ The model for this class of reasons, I think, is the giving of gifts.¹²⁵ Gifts are typically given as pleasing “extras”—they are not expected, or a matter of due course. Rescuing a friend in mortal peril, by contrast, might reasonably be expected. To put it another way, there is independent reason to offer help in the rescue case. Gift-giving is essentially an act that expresses favoritism for no further reason than that

¹²⁴ One might think again here of Aristotle’s claim that even the self-sufficient need friends. Since I think that it is impossible for a human being to be self-sufficient, I limit the absence of need to absence of any *particular* need.

¹²⁵ I take the relation between this class of reasons and the previous one to be similar to the relation between the categories of the obligatory and the supererogatory in normative ethics.

favoritism itself.¹²⁶ I think that it will be instructive, therefore, to consider what constitutes a good gift for a friend. This should help to clarify some of the content of this second class of reasons.

Should an ideal gift further the ends of a loved one? Sometimes it seems appropriate to further the ends of our loved ones, but sometimes it does not. Recall that on my account of close personal love, the attitude of love does *not* entail that the lover fully identifies with the ends of the beloved; instead, love is an endorsement of a system of values specifically as values for the beloved. But even though love on my understanding is not a matter of making my beloved's ends my own, it seems that a certain kind of gift-giving is best understood as furthering the ends of another. Still, this is a case of furthering one's *friend's* ends rather than one's *own*, and it is important that it is done *for the sake of one's friend*. An example of this sort of gift might be if I give Jeané a painting by a particular artist whose work she collects. Establishing this collection is an end that Jeané has set for herself, and by contributing to the collection, I further this end of hers.

It strikes me as interesting, however, that many examples of especially good gifts seem to involve *facilitating* the loved one's furthering of her own ends. Giving Jeané some painting supplies for her art would seem to be a pretty good gift precisely because she would use them in pursuit of one of her own final ends. In contrast, if it were one of her goals to save up the money she would have spent on cigarettes (had she not quit smoking) and use it to buy a particular work of art, my giving her that work of art would not be such a good gift. It may even come across as insulting if I were to do that, since it would appear as if I were

¹²⁶ A birthday or anniversary may provide an appropriate *occasion* for the giving of a gift, but itself is not the reason for the gift.

undermining the value of an important end that she had set for herself. These reflections suggest that what is best about gift-giving in the context of a close personal relationship is an attitude of endorsement of the beloved's ends *specifically as his or her own*. Moreover, it is an endorsement of the beloved's *furthering of her own ends*. What explains the difference between the case where I give Jeané painting supplies and the case where I give her a painting that she had wanted to work to acquire for herself is that in the former, I affirm her pursuit of her ends within the wider context of her system of values, whereas in the latter case, I (at best) merely affirm one of her ends.

What is it about the giving of a gift that facilitates the beloved's furthering of her own ends that makes it such a good gift? It goes beyond a gift that simply furthers an end of the beloved's because it affirms and endorses the beloved's *agency*. It goes beyond the endorsement of the beloved's value system, and celebrates the beloved's capacity to realize (or go some way to realizing) those ends. Gifts of this kind will be especially good gifts when they combine a celebration of the other's agency together with an intimate knowledge of the particular values that the beloved holds dear. These gifts will not meet *needs*; rather, they will be pleasing surprises—acts of beneficence in the absence of any particular need. This suggests that among the reasons generated by close personal relationships are reasons to favor loved ones in the sense of acting beneficently towards them even when there is no obvious need. In particular, one especially good way of doing this, it seems to me, involves celebrating the beloved's agency. Close relationships afford us special opportunities to be beneficent in just this way. Given the good of reciprocal beneficence, we have reason to make use of these opportunities. Part of properly valuing a close personal relationship is to take these opportunities and make the most of them.

It is worth noting that part of acting on the reasons just described would necessarily involve sometimes cultivating an interest in what interests the beloved. If my partner, Joe, comes across a new book that he finds absolutely enthralling, and which he claims may be coloring his entire outlook on life, it seems clear that I now have a reason to read the book. It may be that there are independent reasons for me to read the book, or it may be that there are not; that is beside the point. The point is that the value of the relationship gives me reasons to *care about*, or *take an interest in*, the things he values. While this sort of reason would seem to be entailed by the previous class, I think that it constitutes its own class, because of an independent explanatory root. Relationships generate reasons to cultivate an interest in what interests the other because of the good of *sharing*. To return to the idea of gift-giving, notice that a different kind of very good gift would be one that can be shared between the giver and the recipient. Concert tickets to a favorite musician of Joe's might be such a gift. Part of properly valuing a relationship, then, is to attempt to widen the scope of potential shared pleasure by cultivating an interest in the interests of the beloved.

Finally, the value of close personal relationships seems to give rise to a class of reasons to take certain attitudes and actions toward *ourselves*. One of the reasons why someone who is very depressed should seek help, or why we should in general take good care of ourselves, is generated by the value of our relationships of friendship and love. This case may perhaps not be as clear as some of the others, but it seems to me that neglecting to take care of oneself can be indicative of improperly valuing close relationships.¹²⁷ As I see it,

¹²⁷ The problems here are thorny and complicated. Of course, depression could be the cause of someone's improperly valuing their relationships, which in turn makes it more likely that the depressed person will fail to take care of herself. My intention is not to claim that someone is *blameworthy* for their depression and resultant under-valuing of relationships. Rather, the point is that this in one way that depression can prevent someone from responding appropriately to the reasons that there are.

there are two primary explanations for the class of reasons of self-care being generated by the value of relationships. One is that taking care of oneself is presumably necessary for the pleasantness of shared experiences. But this may seem a rather flippant and unattractive reason for self-care being generated by relationships.

The other way that relationships generate reasons for self-care is in virtue of the good of reciprocity; reciprocity requires both parties to be in a position to be both beneficent and receptive to beneficence. Part of properly valuing a relationship is to take measures to protect and even enhance those aspects of oneself that contribute to the relationship's value. This includes protecting, and exercising, one's agency as well as one's physical health. It also involves some development of the characteristics for which one is loved. If my friends love me (in part) for my passion for literature, the value of my friendships gives me additional reasons for increasing my knowledge of literature, for example. While there are surely independent reasons for self-care, the value of close relationships generates additional reasons of this class. Finally, relationships give rise to reasons to work on improving our value systems. While we are loved in part for our imperfections, these imperfections should be seen by them as small flaws—evidence of humanity, perhaps—against a backdrop that is seen as on the whole good, like a fine work of art.

Conclusion

To briefly restate the results of this chapter, the value of close personal relationships gives rise to the following four classes of reasons. (1) Reasons to favor loved ones over

others in case of need; (2) reasons to favor loved ones over others in case of no particular need; (3) reasons to increase the range of potential shared pleasures; (4) reasons to take good care of ourselves. Responding to these reasons is what it is to properly value close personal relationships that are useful, distinctively pleasant, facilitating of self-understanding, and enhancing of agency.

CHAPTER THREE

THE IMPERSONAL VALUE AND PARTICIPANT-NEUTRAL REASONS OF RELATIONSHIPS

We have now established that close personal relationships bear significant value for their participants, and as such, provide their participants with genuine agent-relative reasons. The ultimate question of the present chapter is whether it is possible to extend these results to people in general. The reasons discussed in the previous chapter might be referred to as *participant-relative* reasons, as they apply specifically to participants in a relationship because of some facts about that relationship. In this chapter, I will argue that relationships and the goods specific to them also give rise to *participant-neutral* reasons, or reasons that apply to one whether or not one is a participant in a particular relationship, or any relationship. Participant-relative reasons will always be agent-relative, in Thomas Nagel's sense,¹²⁸ but participant-neutral reasons can be either agent-relative or agent-neutral.

Given that I understand reasons to be grounded in values, I begin in Section 1 with an examination of the value relationships may have beyond their value as optional, or personal projects. In particular, I argue that the value of relationships is partly *impersonal* in Nagel's sense.¹²⁹ The argument turns on the observation that human beings are imperfect valuers, and that relationships are uniquely suited to respond to these imperfections. I pursue the idea that our friends and loved ones can help us to improve and develop our value systems, and to better express our values in our behavior to show how relationships have a deeper, more general and impersonal significance than other optional, personal projects. This leads fairly naturally, I think, to the claim that there are agent-neutral reasons to respect existing relationships. In Section 2, I take my claim about the impersonal value of relationships further to suggest that their value is significant enough to give us all some

¹²⁸ See the definition of agent-relative and agent-neutral reasons in Section 1 of the previous chapter.

¹²⁹ See Nagel, *The View From Nowhere*, 138-154.

reason to prepare ourselves to be able participants in relationships. Specifically, I argue that the relationship-specific goods of reciprocity and shared experiences gives each of us (even non-participants) reasons to take care of our capacity for reciprocity, and to cultivate broader interests. By taking such steps, I suggest that we can be better prepared to enjoy some of the goods that relationships make possible, and that the very wide range of possible relationships means that we can enjoy some of these goods even in the absence of very close relationships. These reasons may be described as *agent-relative*, but *participant-neutral*.

Before beginning the arguments of this chapter, a quick reminder of the relevant results from the previous chapter and some theoretical background will be helpful. I have argued that close personal relationships give rise to four classes of agent-relative reasons for their participants. They generate reasons (1) to favor loved ones in cases of need; (2) to favor loved ones in cases of no particular need; (3) to increase the range of potential shared experiences; and (4) to take certain actions and attitudes towards ourselves. Each of these reasons was generated by some combination of the following ways that relationships are valuable for their participants: (A) relationships are useful; (B) relationships have a transformative capacity over the character of experience; (C) relationships facilitate deeper self-understanding; and (D) relationships expand the scope of our agency. Each of these ways that relationships are valuable refers to a value that is most obviously thought of as *personal*—valuable from a particular person’s perspective.

The idea that the value of relationships is personal in this way is a familiar treatment that the value of relationships receives in contemporary ethics. On this model, exemplified by Nagel, the value of relationships is essentially connected with the perspective of an

individual.¹³⁰ The value of a relationship does not detach from the perspective of the person whose relationship it is. One of Nagel's main examples of something that is personally valuable is the goal an individual may have of climbing Mount Kilimanjaro, and the idea is that this is something that matters only if an agent occupies the relevant perspective.¹³¹ To put it another way, the only reason one has to care about getting to the top of Mount Kilimanjaro is that one has in fact already come to care about this achievement, or adopted it as an end. Friendship, on this model, is important because we have come to care about our friends and loved ones. The value of *my* relationships on this view is *personal* because it depends on *my* particular perspective.

A second model is given by Shelley Kagan for whom relationships figure as “agent-centered options.”¹³² Kagan's *options* include such things as going to the movies, pursuing activities of personal interest, and relationships with family and friends. Relationships are *optional* in the sense that we may choose to devote our attentions to them, but we need not do so. Kagan himself, as a consequentialist, denies the existence of options, but he accurately describes a common-sense view of morality as including them. If we so choose, on this type of view, we may invest time and energy in our friendships even if doing so would lead to less than optimal outcomes, all things considered. But the important point about seeing relationships this way is that whether or not we do so is up to us—it is a function of particular individual preferences. In this respect, there is no great difference between relationships and other ways we may choose to spend our free time, such as going to the movies, stamp collecting, making origami birds, or playing Solitaire. In sum, according to the

¹³⁰ Nagel, *The View From Nowhere*, 165.

¹³¹ Nagel, *The View From Nowhere*, 167.

¹³² Shelley Kagan, *The Limits of Morality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 3.

Nagel-type view, relationships are valuable to particular agents, contingent on those agents' perspectives, and according to the Kagan-type view, relationships are aspects of life that we may choose to pursue, dependent on our particular interests. On both views, the value and practical importance of relationships is somewhat limited.

For Nagel, the category of personal values finds its point in contrast with impersonal values, paradigm examples of which are pleasure and the absence of pain, and "liberty, general opportunities, and the basic resources of life."¹³³ For Nagel, these values do not require us to occupy the perspective of the person for whom they are valuable to be seen as such. Rather, their importance detaches in thought from the personal perspective and they can be seen to have a fully general importance. Impersonal values therefore make a claim on us all. Nagel's (plausible) proposal is that we all have some reason to reduce suffering, no matter whose it is, and we all have reason to support institutions that protect liberty, no matter whose liberty is at stake. The value of these goods is not contingent on personal perspectives, unlike the value of one's goal of climbing Mount Kilimanjaro. Considering these values in Kagan's framework, we might say that the basic resources of life, for example, are important in a non-optional way. Common-sense morality permits me to go to the movies on a Sunday afternoon if I so choose, but does not permit me to destroy a village's clean water supply to see if I can turn it a pretty shade of green. These examples make the contrast between personal and impersonal value rather clear. But I am not so sure that relationships fall so clearly on the side of personal value, or agent-centered options; their value seems importantly different.

¹³³ Nagel, *The View From Nowhere*, 171.

Of course, many would agree that a good life for a human being should include the ability to pursue optional projects of their own choosing, and some of these will be relationships. But to me this does not exhaust their practical significance. Consider the sense in which, while friendship is voluntary, relationships of friendship nevertheless give rise to reasons that are no longer ‘up to us.’ If I discover that climbing mountains turns out to be much more terrifying than rewarding for me, I can give it up in favor of some other pursuit. Not so with friendship—at least, not so simply. Moreover, the phenomenon of loneliness, or yearning for close relationships, so ubiquitous in art and popular culture, suggests that there is something non-optional about our interest in them. As I will argue in this chapter, relationships constitute a deep, basic, and versatile good. As such, their value is partly *impersonal* in a way that is analogous to the impersonal value of liberty and the basic resources of life. And because their value is impersonal in this way, relationships give us all reasons to take certain actions and attitudes, whether we are participants in particular relationships or not.

1. Relationships as Impersonally Valuable

Relationships are a central good for human beings because relationships respond to a deep feature of being human: vulnerability and imperfection. This is a view that I continue to develop in what immediately follows. It is because we are not self-sufficient that we need relationships with others. Our friends and loved ones can help us scratch an itch, offer a distinct opinion on a matter of personal importance, or feed our cats when we travel. But relationships answer to human vulnerabilities in a less obvious and more interesting way. In

the present chapter, I continue to develop my account of a general type of human imperfection to which I think relationships are especially apt to respond: individual human beings are imperfect valuers.

In what follows, I work with some assumptions about love for which I have argued in previous chapters. First, I assume that love is a response to a person's individual *character*, where character is understood to be a structure of dispositions that are expressive of the individual's commitment to *values*. In other words, an individual's character is a manifestation of that person's *system of values*, a system that may include, for example, a passionate commitment to environmentalism, a love of classical music, and a *ceteris paribus* preference for peace over confrontation in interpersonal relations. I understand a system of values to be the set of things an individual *values* in the sense of the term Samuel Scheffler has argued for.¹³⁴ When we get to know another person well, what we become better acquainted with is that person's system of values as expressed through her character. So, I assume that a large part of why we love the people we do has to do with the way that we perceive our loved ones as valuers. Relationships, I will suggest, are especially apt to respond to the fact that as human beings we are *imperfect* valuers. Relationships enable us to better understand our value systems, they help us to develop our value systems for the better, and they allow us the opportunity to practice our values in such a way that we can become better agents. It is in these ways that the value of relationships is shown to be basic and versatile and accordingly impersonal.

¹³⁴ See Scheffler, "Valuing," 15-40.

1.1. Imperfectly Systematic Value Systems

One way that a relationship like friendship is responsive to human imperfection is that our friends are well-positioned to see inconsistencies in our value systems. In this respect, our friends and other participants in close relationships occupy a doubly privileged perspective on our value systems. On the one hand, a friend knows my value system very well. But, because she is a distinct person, and so has some distance from my value system, her perspective is in some ways privileged even in comparison with mine. A friend can have an even clearer perception of some particular part of my value system than I do myself. For example, a friend can point out an apparent inconsistency, or tension, between my valuing a particular artist and my commitment to a social concern that this artist is well known to have flouted. Suppose that until my friend points this tension out to me, it had not bothered me. I have had a sort of ‘blind spot’ due to my strong emotional attachment to his art. My friend’s observation can lead me to question whether I am comfortable holding both values, and I may decide that while I still value the artist’s *art*, I now recognize a need to speak out against his behavior when discussing my appreciation of him. A close relationship allows for a perspective which is fresh and distinct, but also intimately acquainted with my value system. No one but our fellow participants in close relationships occupies this doubly privileged perspective of our value systems.¹³⁵

¹³⁵ Perhaps something other than a close friend can occupy the doubly privileged perspective I mention to some extent. The most convincing potential counterexample is, I think, a therapist who would presumably be closely acquainted with one’s value system while maintaining a different perspective on it that one’s own. But something that a close relationship provides that is presumably missing in the therapist case is affection for the other person, which makes her perspective especially salient to one. We care about how our friends see us in a way that typically does not characterize our interactions with mere acquaintances. Because we care about our friends’ perceptions of us, we are more likely to be motivated by them than by the

1.2. Less Than Perfect Values

Second, our friends can help us recognize values of which we were previously unaware, and in this way can help us to develop and improve the contents, so to speak, of our value systems. One reason why our friends are especially well suited to help us in this regard is that, given their intimate acquaintance with our particular value systems, they are able to present considerations in favor of a particular value in a way that will be especially salient to us. Because our friends are well acquainted with our particular values, they know how to appeal to them in order to make us more receptive to new potential elements for our value systems. They know, better than most, how to ‘translate’ values that are presently external to our value systems so that we may internalize them.

Once again here, to make the point clear, I resort to caricature. Recall Scrooge, who is inclined to attend a boxing match rather than engage in some other activity in part because the sport of boxing tends often to lead to brain injuries, and Scrooge finds this somewhat amusing. Now, if Scrooge had a friend, his friend may be able to bring intelligence in general within the sphere of things Scrooge values in the following way.¹³⁶ First Scrooge’s friend might tell Scrooge an amusing story about a cunning and witty scoundrel who succeeds in some mischievous endeavor. In response, Scrooge chuckles in delight. Scrooge’s friend

perspectives of others. To the extent that one does care about the perspective of one’s therapist in this way, I suggest there is a relationship of the relevant kind in place.

¹³⁶ I am assuming here that intelligence in general is not already among the elements of Scrooge’s value system. The example differs in this respect from the previous one in which Scrooge featured. We might see this example as a hypothetical precursor to the previous one.

might then ask him why he enjoys the story so. We can then imagine a conversation that proceeds in stages, drawing attention to the features of the scoundrel in the story (cunning, wittiness) that might be understood as particular aspects of intelligence—a general phenomenon with broad potential uses and value. By the end of the conversation, lo and behold, Scrooge has come to recognize the value of intelligence—he has incorporated intelligence in general into his system of values.

Admittedly, once again, this example is exaggerated and somewhat ridiculous. But I believe its point is easily applicable (though perhaps not so easily illustrated) in the case of normal human beings with lesser imperfections. The point I hope it illustrates is this: Scrooge's friend recognizes the value of something that he knows Scrooge does not himself recognize as valuable. Given that he believes it to be genuinely valuable and important, he thinks it would be good for Scrooge to recognize its value. Knowing Scrooge as he does, he knows that pointing out the great achievements of human intelligence in the sciences or literature, for example, would not much appeal to Scrooge. Instead, he uses an aspect of intelligence that he knows Scrooge is likely to appreciate—cunning mischief. In this way, Scrooge's friend is better able than most to effectively help Scrooge develop and improve his value system.

In addition to sometimes deliberately showing us the value of something new, our friends help us to develop our value systems by themselves valuing things that we do not value. The extent to which our friends' valuing affects our own value systems varies widely. In some cases, our friends' valuing something can lead us to value it in a full sense—in something like Scheffler's rich sense of valuing. In such a case, we would *believe* it is valuable, be *emotionally vulnerable* to considerations regarding it, see those emotional reactions

as *appropriate*, and see it as *reason-giving*.¹³⁷ But there is a subtler way that a friend's valuing can affect one's value system. In what follows, I suggest that relationships play a significant role in expanding the boundaries of our system of values, beginning with a minimal case in which a new element becomes *available to* my value system, without being actually incorporated in it.¹³⁸ I work up from this minimal case to what I call the full *Schefflerian* sense of valuing, which is when a new element is fully incorporated into my system of values.

Imagine that a friend of mine has a great passion for impressionist painting. Initially, suppose impressionist painting has no appeal for me, but since it is my friend's birthday, I agree to accompany her to a special exhibition of Monet's work. The art itself doesn't excite me much, but I am having a good time catching up with my friend, and remembering what it is I so love about her—her particular turns of phrase, her quirky disliking of butterflies, perhaps. And I find I am quite enjoying hearing her talk about what she likes in the paintings we see. Though it still doesn't have much of an aesthetic appeal for me, I am beginning to appreciate why she is so passionate about this art—how if one stands at a certain distance from the painting, one can almost see the rain combining with the dappled sunlight in a way that is not apparent when one moves closer to the painting.

This sort of experience can have a significant effect on my attitude toward impressionist painting. Suppose I remain unmoved by the art in terms of its aesthetic value; it still does not appeal to me. Nevertheless, witnessing my dear friend's profound valuing of

¹³⁷ These are the four components of valuing that Scheffler lists in "Valuing," 29.

¹³⁸ In this, I am developing a line of thought that Scheffler suggests in footnote 39 of "Valuing," 38. He describes a view according to which "a belief that X is valuable, when accompanied by a disposition to experience (say) mild X-related regret if X is destroyed, may not itself constitute an instance of valuing, but it may differ only in degree from a case of valuing in which the level of emotional vulnerability is attenuated. The two cases may still be distinguished from one another by reference to the degrees of emotional vulnerability involved and the kinds of reasons for action that the people in question recognize, but the difference may not be as stark as in some other pairs of cases."

the art affects me. Whereas before this experience, I may have had a rather weak belief that impressionist art *must be* valuable, given that it is in fact valued by many, my understanding of its value is now rather more solidified. I have now seen how the art affects a person with whose value system I am fairly well acquainted. My acquaintance with, and general endorsement of, my friend's value system sensitizes me to elements of her value system which I do not share. In this particular case, I may be emotionally moved by witnessing that *she* is emotionally moved by the paintings. It is not that I myself am emotionally affected by the paintings, but I am moved by the fact that my friend is so emotionally affected, and this means that the paintings have taken on a new role in my emotional life, albeit a minimal one. This case certainly falls short of my coming to *value* impressionist art in the full Schefflerian sense, but it seems to involve a bit more than merely *believing* that such art is valuable. Seeing my friend so moved can enable me to understand that these paintings really are worth valuing; the fact that someone I love values them demonstrates this to me in a way that the mere knowledge that *someone* values them does not. My loved one's valuing of the paintings makes their value *come alive* for me, arguably a necessary precondition for actually valuing them myself.¹³⁹ Perhaps we can describe this case as one in which my belief in the value of impressionist art has been strengthened and minimally emotionally *charged*. Impressionist art has therefore taken on a role in my emotional life, albeit an indirect and minimal one.

The experience with my friend may have a more significant effect on me. Some months after our visit to the Monet exhibit, I may come across an impressionist painting while on my own, and notice that it has features that my friend helped me to see. I find that I am able to feel somewhat moved by the painting, and spend some time appreciating it. It is

¹³⁹ Thanks to Nandi Theunissen for suggesting this description of the case to me.

still not the case that the art has *much* of an aesthetic appeal for me, but I begin to spend a little more time in front of impressionist paintings than I had before. In fact, I may even take a detour through the impressionist wing of a gallery I am visiting if it is not too far out of my way. In this case, my attitude toward impressionist art would seem to be one of *valuing*, though perhaps not a very strong form of valuing. We might think of this as a weaker form of valuing than Scheffler's strong form of valuing. The art has, in this case, taken on a more significant and direct role in my emotional and deliberative life, but it is still a small one.

The cases I've so far described capture a rather familiar experience, I think—the experience of being sensitive to the interests and values of our friends. But sometimes, our friends' valuing can have a much more profound effect on our own values. Sometimes, I come to value something in a fully rich sense as a result of my friend's valuing it. The visit with my friend to the Monet exhibit may eventually result in this art becoming something that I believe is valuable, something that moves me emotionally, and something toward which I believe such an emotional response is appropriate. Indeed, I am now somewhat disposed to attend exhibits of impressionist paintings, and to support their preservation; I am disposed to see them as reason-giving. That is to say, it is possible that my friend's valuing something can lead to my valuing it in the full Schefflerian sense.

It is important that the change in my attitude toward impressionist paintings, in each of the three cases I have described, would not have happened had it not been for my close relationship with and love for my friend. It is because of my intimate knowledge of and affection for my friend that I came to see impressionist art as genuinely valuable in the first case, that I came to value it in a weak sense in the second case, and that I came to value it in the full Schefflerian sense in the third case. Even if our loved ones' valuing does not lead to

our *strong* valuing of impressionist art, for example, it likely does go some way toward bringing it within reach of our value systems. In this way, our friends help us to develop our value systems. Our value systems are able to include new elements, *which were not formerly to our taste*, elements that would likely never have been included if it had not been for the ‘way in,’ so to speak, provided by our loved ones’ valuing of them.

I have suggested that our friends can help us expand the boundaries of our value systems, but this does not necessarily mean that they will help us *improve* our value systems. A value system with more contents is not necessarily an improved value system. Sometimes, quite the opposite is true. Our friends’ facilitation of the expanding of our value systems is therefore not always a good thing. But note the value of the kind of change in the first case I described above—the one where my belief in the value of impressionist art is strengthened and slightly emotionally charged. The ability to actually *see* something *as valuable*, as opposed to merely believing in a rather abstract way that it must be (or is probably) valuable is significant. I suggest that this is a necessary intermediate step on the way to valuing. Whereas I know that there are many people who value bird-watching, and so *assume* that there is value in the activity, I have *seen* the value of impressionist art in my loved one’s valuing of it. This brings impressionist art within the sphere of things I am potentially able to value—a sphere that does not presently include the activity of bird-watching.¹⁴⁰ My suggestion is that this minimal emotional charge attached to a belief in something’s value is a necessary precondition for valuing.¹⁴¹ That relationships can facilitate this sort of change is important because it means we can be more open-minded about what is valuable.

¹⁴⁰ The bird-watching example is Scheffler’s in “Valuing,” 21.

¹⁴¹ I am not claiming that it is *only* through our loved ones’ valuing that new elements can be brought within reach of our value systems. This can presumably be achieved by other experiences and realizations, too. Perhaps I can begin to see the value of bird-watching after learning a particularly interesting fact about birds’

But what of cases where I fully incorporate a new element into my value system—the kind of case described in the third case above? Is it a good thing for me to incorporate impressionist art into my value system in the full Schefflerian sense? As Scheffler notes, there are significant limits to what any one person can value, and so it cannot be that this is always a good thing, even if the element in question is genuinely valuable.¹⁴² Nevertheless, it is often the case that coming to value something new is experienced as an enrichment of our lives. And the route in to our value systems via our loved ones' value systems is significant because it is conducive to valuable shared experiences.¹⁴³ For these reasons, I find it plausible that it is a good thing that our friends have the capacity to help us expand the boundaries of our value systems, though that is by no means the only way they can help us improve them.

1.3. Imperfectly Expressing Our Values

A third way that relationships answer to our imperfections is that our friends and loved ones are uniquely well suited to help us better *manifest* our own values in our characters. One aspect of this is that, given their knowledge of our values, they are especially well positioned to hold us to our own values. Strangers who do not know that I am trying to convert to vegetarianism will not care (absent their own commitments) if I order a cheeseburger, but someone with whom I have spoken about my decision and my reasons for it may justifiably be disappointed in me if I renege. A friend would know that in this

migration patterns, for example. But my suggestion is that relationships are a significant facilitator of this sort of process.

¹⁴² See Scheffler, "Valuing," 21 and 27.

¹⁴³ I return to the good of shared experiences in Section 2 below.

moment I was putting momentary pleasure ahead of a considered and personally important ethical commitment. The knowledge of this fact can help me keep my resolve.

Relationships further help us to better express our values because of the unique opportunity our friends and loved ones afford us for exploring our values in practice, something that is essential to character development. Engaging with fiction might go some way toward helping us develop our characters, insofar as it encourages us to think about different sorts of people with different value systems, and the nature of good and bad actions with respect to them. But relationships offer something that engaging with fiction cannot, and that is the opportunity for actually *practicing*—the opportunity to exercise our agency in relevant ways. Aristotle was right in thinking that virtue is something that needs to be learned through practice, rather than merely through study, and our friends and loved ones are invaluable to us for this reason. Our relationships with others enable us to *habituate* ourselves to ways of behaving that will have consequences far beyond our close relationships.

For example, our friends and loved ones are especially apt beneficiaries of our generosity, our aid, our kindness, and other similar virtues. They therefore provide us with opportunities to practice these virtues, and so in effect to practice being better people. This is exceptionally valuable if putting one's values into practice is necessary to hone them, entrench them, and so to solidify one's integrity, as I think is plausible.¹⁴⁴ The point here is that our friends, in being especially apt recipients of our other-directed actions, are crucial to

¹⁴⁴ I focus here on the practice and expression of values that are *virtuous* (e.g. kindness, beneficence, etc.), but the point is not limited to these values. I do in fact think that close relationships are especially well suited to help us learn about virtues, for reasons that should become clear in the discussion that follows. But the point I am making is also more general: close relationships provide us with the opportunity to practice expressing our values *whatever* they may be. This means that the character 'development' they facilitate need not be in the direction of virtue. (See also footnote 148 below, and the paragraph to which it attaches.)

helping us take care of, or develop, our characters. In particular, relationships allow us to refine, in a practical way, those of our values that affect interpersonal interaction.

Take the example of a commitment to being beneficent. Relationships are uniquely suited to facilitate the expression of this value because they provide a unique backdrop for *reciprocal beneficence*. Given that I am intimately acquainted with my loved ones' value systems, I am especially likely to do well in exercising my beneficence in relation to my close friends and loved ones. I am likely to know just what sorts of things would *count* as beneficent actions toward them. The same is true of generous actions, or kind actions. For example, I know that while washing the dishes for one friend might be a suitable act of kindness when she is feeling low, for another friend, washing the dishes may be taken as somewhat intrusive or insulting. In other words, my intimate acquaintance with my various close relatives enables me to explore, in practice, the nature of beneficence, kindness, or generosity. This means that our relationships provide us with a uniquely valuable space in which to practice being beneficent (for example), but our beneficence need not (indeed it hopefully will not) end there.

It is worth noting that because we *like* our friends and loved ones, we are quite likely to be interested in being *good* to them. This is why beneficence, kindness, and generosity are apt examples of values that are practically explored in relationships. But the exploration of other-directed actions and gestures that is facilitated by close personal relationships should lead to a deeper understanding of what it is to be a good person and to do good things *in general*. Understanding that a particular action is kind when done for one friend rather than another sheds light on the nature of kindness, and so hopefully helps me recognize what might count as kindness in novel situations, and with people I know less well. In other

words, my close personal relationships provide an extremely valuable arena within which I can develop my *phronēsis*, or practical wisdom. My view, then, is that being good to our loved ones provides us with an invaluable opportunity to develop our virtue—to practice, and learn about being good in general.¹⁴⁵ Nothing but close personal relationships provides us with the opportunity to develop and take care of our characters in this way.

It is not my claim that this is an importance we are ordinarily aware of, or feel particularly compelled by. On the contrary, I think we are often more relaxed about the way we treat our friends and loved ones, since we know that there is often some leeway and room for forgiveness in relation to them that may not be there in relation to others.¹⁴⁶ But this is why it is *in fact* so important to aim to do well in relation to our close friends and loved ones. It is in this relatively relaxed arena that our habits form. Of course, it is a good thing if our friends and loved ones are able and inclined to be forgiving of our mistakes and shortcomings; this means that we have a relatively ‘safe’ space in which to practice human interaction (and also simply to relax). But the combination of the fact that our friends *are* likely to be inclined to forgive us and the fact that they are the people we *love most* makes the arena of close personal relationships immensely important as an area of our lives to which we should pay careful attention. In particular, we should take special care to aim for goodness in our close personal relationships.

¹⁴⁵ I am grateful to Nandi Theunissen for getting me to think about this aspect of personal relationships.

¹⁴⁶ On this point, my view is the opposite of Christine Korsgaard’s: she sees friendship as the area where we most fully hold people responsible. Korsgaard’s description strikes me as an inaccurate description of the experience of friendship in this respect. See Korsgaard, “Creating the Kingdom of Ends: Reciprocity and Responsibility in Personal Relations,” *Philosophical Perspectives* 6 (1992): 305-332.

First Conclusion: The Basic, Versatile, and Therefore Impersonal Value of Relationships

In sum, I have described three broad categories in which close personal relationships can help us develop and improve ourselves as valuers. They can help us improve the coherence or systematicity of our value systems, which will mean that we have an improved understanding of our own values. They can help us incorporate new values into our value systems, which can be a way of improving our value systems and therefore our characters, and they can help us better manifest our own values in our decisions and actions. Succinctly put, relating with others enables deeper self-understanding, development of one's character, and enhanced agency. It is because personal relationships provide this simultaneously safe but very significant arena for developing ourselves and exercising our agency that they have an impersonal value of a sort that might be compared with pleasure and pain on Nagel's view.

Like the subjective character of our experience (whether it is pleasant or painful), and like basic rights and liberties, it is plausible that the development of our characters is something we all have reason to care about, whatever else we may or may not care about. This is because having a character that is in good shape, so to speak, is extremely *versatile* in its usefulness and also absolutely *necessary* for attaining a wide range of further goods. What good is the right to make decisions regarding one's own body, for example, without a reasonably good character through which to exercise this right? Why should I care if I have the freedom to act on my own decisions unless these decisions are going to be informed by

values that I actually hold, values that are somewhat consistent with one another, and that are plausibly good values to hold?

The point here is that bare autonomy, along with a decent arena within which to exercise it, seems rather unimportant unless it is connected in a particular way with what an individual values. This point is *general* because it does not matter which particular elements are constituents of any particular person's value system; rather, what matters is that the person's *character* is in such a condition as *to be able to* make the right connection between that person's particular value system and their exercising of their autonomy. My claim is that close personal relationships are distinctively valuable because they are uniquely suited to facilitating our development of this capacity. Having one's character in good shape in the sense I have been describing here is a *basic* good for human beings, no matter what particular preferences, values, or projects they may have. It is in this way that close personal relationships bear value that is *general* or *impersonal* in a way that someone's project of climbing Mount Kilimanjaro might not be. We may not all have reasons to care about whether some person climbs Mount Kilimanjaro, but we do all have reasons to care about some person's close personal relationships insofar as they constitute the basic good of a safe and significant space in which to develop one's character.

One may wonder, at this point, if I have really shown that relationships are so very different from personal projects or options. I've claimed that relationships are well suited to foster a valuable kind of character development that has many potential applications. But surely a personal project of climbing Mount Kilimanjaro does this too—it would certainly seem to be able to teach me self-discipline, perseverance, and courage, for example, all of which have many other valuable applications. And similar things might be said about many

other optional, personal projects and activities. Even engaging with fiction, as I noted above, goes some way to developing good character traits. But I think that relationships are to be distinguished for they are *uniquely* suited to a particular role in character development. Nothing but close personal relationships can provide the special arena for practicing other-directed actions and exploring their meaning in relation to our values that I have been describing. The special aptness of close relationships to do this is explained by the combination of two of their features: the reciprocal context they provide, and the great personal value they have for us. The arena provided by such relationships allows us to actually *practice* with real people, and the fact that we *care* deeply for these people makes us care about what we are practicing. Climbing Mount Kilimanjaro can certainly help me develop versatile character traits, and engaging with fiction can certainly deepen my understanding of my own values and those that others might hold. But as I've argued above, the context of reciprocity with a loved one raises the stakes significantly.¹⁴⁷

Of course, it would be terribly naïve to claim that relationships always facilitate *good* character development; sometimes, a friendship may have a role in inculcating a bad habit, such as spiteful gossip.¹⁴⁸ But my claim that the arena for character development is an important and basic good for human beings is not necessarily threatened by this. An individual's liberty is not always good for him—i.e., it does not always lead to good results for him or for others. But his liberty itself is nevertheless certainly good for him insofar as it

¹⁴⁷ The connection between personal projects and activities that plausibly play a role in character development with close relationships is interesting. It would seem that challenging projects (climbing Mount Kilimanjaro, for example) can be less daunting if faced with a friend, and it would also seem that sharing such experiences can strengthen or indeed ground a close relationship. I cannot say too much about this here, but I return to the value of shared experiences in Section 2.

¹⁴⁸ I am grateful to Richard Bett for prompting me to address the role relationships can have in the corruption of character, as well as its positive development.

is a versatile and necessary precondition for many other things that will be good for him and for others. I think the value of relationships is similar: though particular relationships may have a corrupting influence, the structure of a relationship in general provides us with a distinctively valuable arena in which to practice other-directed actions, and to learn about them in a practical way. They provide us with an arena in which we can figure out, in practice, what our values are and how best to live up to them. That things sometimes go wrong, in the sense that some friendships will encourage an agent to develop bad habits she otherwise would not have developed, does not detract from the value of relationships as a versatile, necessary precondition for practicing the expression of our values.¹⁴⁹

Let me address a final concern before I move on. It may look as if I am making an implausibly strong claim to the effect that there is a deeply important good for human beings that is unattainable without close relationships. But what about those who find it difficult—for reasons beyond their control—to form and maintain close relationships? And what about those who prefer independence and privacy over the intimacy that often goes with close relationships? Am I claiming that these people are missing something without which they cannot lead good lives?

My response to this concern has two parts. The first part is to some extent a bullet-biting response. But there is an important insight to be gleaned here. That relationships constitute such a basic and versatile good for human beings in fact goes some way in explaining the pain of loneliness. The longing for a close relationship—or the grief one

¹⁴⁹ Below, I argue that the relationship-specific good of reciprocity gives us all reasons to be more open-minded, or to try new things. When taken together with that claim, the worry about the corrupting influence of particular relationships may be allayed somewhat, since the recommendation would seem to be against letting any one friend (or group of friends, for that matter) exercise too much influence over one's values.

typically feels at the end of one—is an experience with which we can surely all identify. But my second point is to note the wide variety of forms that relationships can take. It need not be the case that everyone has very close or intimate relationships to escape loneliness. For some people, relatively distant kinds of relationships may be preferable to closer ones. Participants in those relationships would presumably enjoy the good I have described as distinctive of *close* relationships to a lesser degree than participants in closer relationships, but there may be countervailing considerations against very close relationships that make their lesser enjoyment of this good most reasonable for them. But to imagine a person without *any* such relationships is to imagine someone who is surely terribly lonely, someone whose life is devoid of a very important human good.¹⁵⁰ The central role of *some* relationships in our lives, and indeed, in who we are, is universal. In what follows, I suggest that the value of *relationship-specific goods* is significant enough to give rise to reasons even for non-participants to take steps toward engaging with it. Doing so can be good for people even if they are not able or choose not to engage in actual close relationships.

If my argument thus far has been successful, this means that existing relationships bear impersonal value, and so give rise to reasons for all. According to Nagel's analysis, impersonal values generate "agent-neutral reasons." Nagel defines an agent-neutral reason as a reason whose general form does not include an essential reference to the person whose reason it is, while an agent-relative reason does so include it.¹⁵¹ Since they are taken to be personally valuable, relationships are generally assumed to give rise to agent-relative reasons.

¹⁵⁰ Compare the subjective character of experience (whether it is pleasant or painful) as a basic human good. Surely, someone whose every experience is painful rather than pleasant is missing an important human good. It is plausible that some amount of pleasantness is necessary for a decent human life. But there are often reasons to forgo a pleasant experience (or to suffer a painful one) that are more important to the agent than the value of pleasure and the absence of pain.

¹⁵¹ Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*, 152-153.

So since my relationship with my partner has special significance for me, I have reason to favor him over other people, and to celebrate our anniversary, where others do not. But if the value of relationships is partly *impersonal* as I have been arguing, then they presumably give rise to some agent-neutral reasons as well. This is the claim I take up in the next section.

2. Reasons to Engage with Relationship-Specific Goods

Before I discuss specific agent-neutral reasons that arise out of relationships, a closer look at Nagel's position on the connection between impersonal value and agent-neutral reasons may be helpful. In short, Nagel's view is that personal values, which are tied to a particular agent's perspective, give rise to agent-relative reasons, whereas impersonal values, not being tied to a particular perspective, give rise to agent-neutral reasons. No matter what your particular perspective, you have reason to care about impersonal values.

Nagel accepts that some contributors to wellbeing have impersonal value—he thinks, for example, that physical pain is plausibly construed as ‘objectively bad,’ meaning that no matter whose pain it is, any agent has reason to want it to stop. However, he does *not* think that people's more individual interests and preferences have general practical importance in this way. One of his examples is of having an interest in climbing Mount Kilimanjaro:

Though some human interests (and not only pleasure and pain) give rise to impersonal values, I now want to argue that not all of them do. If I have a bad headache, anyone has a reason to want it to stop. But if I badly want to climb to the top of Mount Kilimanjaro, not everyone has a reason to want me to succeed. I have a reason to try to get to the top, and it

may be much stronger than my reason for wanting a headache to go away, but other people have very little reason, if any, to care whether I climb the mountain or not.¹⁵²

Nagel's argument for this claim is, roughly, that the value for a person in this kind of personal project is *dependent* on that person's particular perspective, including her contingent preferences. Since the value is generated by facts about the particular person's interests, it lacks general practical importance.¹⁵³ If Nagel is right about this, then the challenge I face is to show that close personal relationships are relevantly dissimilar to personal projects like climbing Mount Kilimanjaro. A case must be made that relationships bear (positive) value that is more similar to the (negative) value of physical pain. The key is to show that close personal relationships have value beyond their value as optional, personal projects; this is the claim I have argued for in the previous section. I have been arguing that relationships (unlike other, individual personal projects in general) make possible goods that have a wider import, or a special status. This result suggests that relationships give rise to agent-neutral reasons as well as the more obvious agent-relative reasons.

What is the *content* of relationship-generated agent-neutral reasons? I submit that the appropriate response is well captured by what Joseph Raz calls *reasons of respect*.¹⁵⁴ While relationships don't seem to be the sorts of things that we all have reason to *promote*, we do all have reason to recognize and acknowledge, in thought and in action, the value of close

¹⁵² Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*, 167.

¹⁵³ See Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*, 167-168.

¹⁵⁴ See Joseph Raz, "Respecting People," *Value, Respect, and Attachment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 124-176.

personal relationships. Furthermore, we all have reason not to destroy, but rather to preserve and protect relationships that bear this value.¹⁵⁵

But it would seem that if my arguments thus far are successful, they go a bit further than this. It seems that they suggest that we in fact all have some reason to *engage* with the value of close personal relationships—to make ourselves available to them. Raz distinguishes three “stages” of responding to value: first is the mental recognition of something as valuable, second is the preservation of objects of value, and third is engagement with objects of value.¹⁵⁶ The first two stages describe reasons of respect, while the third describes reasons for engagement. So far, I have been arguing that existing relationships give rise to reasons of the first two kinds, and that they do so for all agents. But, given the basic and versatile nature of the value I’ve argued characterizes close personal relationships, I don’t think Raz’s first two stages exhaust the reasons we all have with respect to close personal relationships; I think we in fact all have some reason to engage with the value specific to relationships.

But here we need to be careful to distinguish between the reasons we all have with regard to *existing* close personal relationships in which we are not participants, and the value that *potential* relationships as such make possible, and so make them worth pursuing or engaging in for everyone. (It is certainly not the case that Barack and Michelle’s relationship gives us all reasons to engage in the value of *that* particular relationship. Raz’s reasons of respect are quite sufficient as ways to respond to that value.) Rather, I argue that

¹⁵⁵ These two kinds of reasons are Raz’s reasons of respect. See “Respecting People,” pp. 161-164. While agent-neutral reasons are typically taken to be reasons to promote positive values and prevent or decrease negative ones, there is no reason why appropriate responses to impersonal value should be limited to promoting and preventing. On non-promoting responses to value, see Elizabeth Anderson, *Value in Ethics and Economics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993) and T. M. Scanlon *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1998).

¹⁵⁶ See Raz, “Respecting People,” 161-164.

relationship-specific goods give us all reasons to take certain actions and attitudes toward *ourselves* in the interests of making ourselves able participants in relationships, whether we already participate in such relationships or not. I argue for two broad classes of reasons that arise from relationships, not only for their participants, but for agents in general. These reasons would be agent-relative according to Nagel's characterization in that they will be reasons for *specific* agents to take certain actions and attitudes toward *themselves*.¹⁵⁷ But they are interesting in that they apply regardless of whether one is a participant in a particular relationship. In what follows, I use the term *participant-relative* to refer to reasons that apply specifically to participants in a relationship because of some facts about that relationship, and I use the term *participant-neutral* to refer to reasons that apply to one whether or not one is a participant in some particular relationship, or any relationship for that matter. Participant-relative reasons, being a sub-set of agent-relative reasons, will necessarily be agent-relative, but agent-relative reasons need not be participant-relative.

2.1. Reasons to Take Care of One's Capacity for Reciprocity

Close personal relationships, insofar as they are valuable, give their participants reasons to take steps to ensure that they are good potential relatives¹⁵⁸—that they are in good shape, so to speak, to be good participants in reciprocal relationships. Because we are

¹⁵⁷ In this respect, they are similar to deontological constraints, as Nagel describes them: “[Deontological constraints] are not impersonal claims derived from the interests of others, but personal demands governing one's relations with others. (*The View From Nowhere*, p. 176.)

¹⁵⁸ I use the term ‘relatives’ here in a rather technical sense here: one's relatives are the people with whom one is in a loving or friendly relationship. I do not intend the ordinary connotation of biological relatedness that the term typically calls to mind.

valuable to our relatives, our relationships with them give rise to reasons to take good care of ourselves—additional reasons beyond those we might already have to take good care of ourselves. In the present chapter, I have been arguing that close personal relationships in fact provide a deeply, or basically, valuable space in which we can develop these skills of character, among others. I now want to argue that this relationship-specific good—that safe but significant space in which to develop our characters—in fact gives even non-participants reasons to become good *potential* relatives. The value of *reciprocity* that characterizes close personal relationships entails that part of properly recognizing it is to ensure that one is in good shape both to *be* beneficent and to *be appropriately receptive to* beneficence, for example. This point—that relationships give participants and non-participants alike reasons to take care of their *characters for the sake of reciprocity*—further distinguishes the value of relationships from the value of optional personal projects or preferences.

The reader may be concerned at this point that I am leading myself in to a vicious circle. I have argued that relationships are deeply and basically valuable because they facilitate character development, but I am now claiming that the possibility of this relationship-specific good gives us all reasons to develop our characters so that we can engage with the value of relationships, and so develop our characters... But I think this worry is misplaced; the circle is not vicious. It is more apt to think of this as a cyclical process of development, or perhaps a productive feedback loop. The reciprocity that relationships make possible gives us reasons to take certain steps to ensure that we can participate well in reciprocal relationships. To risk a sentence that is difficult to parse, there is a reciprocal relationship between what reciprocal relationships can do for us and what we should do for reciprocal relationships. This shouldn't be too hard to swallow if one compares it to Aristotle's view of virtue development: one practices performing the sort of actions a virtuous person would

perform and thereby makes some gains in practical wisdom, which enables the person to perform more virtuous actions, which leads to deeper understanding, and so on. The process I have in mind is similar to the way Aristotle describes the process of habituation, and the similarity is perhaps unsurprising, given that character development is what is at issue.

Having already devoted a fair amount of attention to one side of this reciprocal process (what reciprocal relationships can do for us), I now wish to focus on the other (what we should do for reciprocal relationships). What steps do we have reason to take to make ourselves able participants in reciprocal relationships? Given the wide and varied range of potential relationships and individuals who may participate in them, I cannot hope to give a definite and general answer here. The form that the relationship-specific good of an ongoing context for reciprocity takes will vary widely, for example. What counts as a good expression of generosity in the context of a relationship with one's regular friendly barista will differ substantially from a good expression of generosity in the context of a life-partnership, for example. I think I can, however, point to some broad types of skills we should aim for and some pitfalls we should strive to avoid in order to take care of our capacities for reciprocity.

As I noted in the previous chapter, an extremely depressed participant in a relationship might be unable to respond appropriately to the value of the relationship, and so relationships give their participants some reason to take steps to guard against depression or to recover from depression if it occurs.¹⁵⁹ One of the reasons why depression can be a

¹⁵⁹ Once again, I want to emphasize that it is not my intention to claim that depressed individuals are to blame for their depression, or that they are letting their loved ones down. These are difficult and complex situations without an easy fix. It is simply my claim that depressed individuals have some reasons to work to overcome their depression—reasons that arise specifically from their relationships. They no doubt have other reasons to work to overcome their depression in addition to these, and may still be so debilitated by the depression so as not to be able to respond to any of them. Claiming that the reasons are there is not necessarily to find fault with a person who does not respond to them.

hindrance to appropriately responding to relatives is that it renders one unable to practice much beneficence. Furthermore, severely depressed individuals are likely not able to be appropriately receptive to beneficence. Depression can hinder one from recognizing acts of kindness or beneficence as what they are, for example. Here, I think, is the key to seeing what the content of the reasons we have to make ourselves able participants in reciprocal relationships will often look like.

In general, it would seem that the relationship-specific good of reciprocity gives us all reasons to practice good self-care, including a kind of mental hygiene, so that we will be able to practice beneficence and be appropriately receptive to beneficence. What this means in practice will vary from person to person and situation to situation, but in general, bearing these goals in mind and attempting some steps in their furtherance would seem to be recommended by the value of reciprocity. Some likely appropriate responses would be to work on one's listening and communication skills, and to remember that one's perceptions of others' behavior can be clouded by one's own emotional vulnerabilities. I could, for example, make an effort to identify my own patterns of misperceiving social situations (being easily angered before my morning coffee, or feeling affronted after a trying day), and remember to take a step back from my emotional reactions in such situations.

2.2. Reasons to Cultivate New Interests

The relationship-specific good of reciprocity gives us all reasons to practice good mental hygiene and self-care, to do what we can to ensure that we are able to be beneficent and to be receptive to beneficence. But reciprocity is not the only relationship-specific good

that gives rise to reasons for us all to take steps toward engaging in relationships. Another is the value of shared experiences that relationships facilitate. The *sharedness* of an experience has the capacity to transform the character of the experience. The pleasantness of a shared meal, for example, is quite different from the pleasure of the meal itself. Valuable relationships give us reasons to open ourselves up to the possibility of a greater range of shared experiences by, for example, cultivating an interest in the interests of our loved ones. Now, if close personal relationships provide the arena for shared experiences, and shared experiences are generally valuable (at least insofar as they are good experiences), then we all have some reason to widen the range of potential shared experiences. This would mean that relationship-specific goods give us all reasons to cultivate new interests, or broaden the horizons of our experience to some extent. So, this is a second case in which a good that is made possible by relationships may constitute a reason for non-participants to make themselves available and able to be good participants in relationships.

Cultivating wider interests will tend to make us better potential relatives, which might be good for us and good for others in general. There are of course all kinds of reasons for cultivating new interests and widening the range of our experiences. These reasons might include the general advantages Mill thought could be gained by ‘experiments in living,’ and the intrinsic value of, say, learning to appreciate classical music. But it is interesting that relationships might provide us with additional, independent, reasons to broaden our experiential horizons, regardless of whether the experiences in question have utility or intrinsic value. Simply put, the point here is that we have reasons to try new things, and these reasons are grounded in the value of *relationship-specific goods*. We have reason to try new things both because it makes us more likely to be able to partake in the relationship-specific good

of sharing, and also because it is good for others who might relate with us if we are better potential relatives.

To be clear, my suggestion here is that close personal relationships give agents *in general* reasons to broaden the range of their experiences. My argument is as follows. Close personal relationships are valuable in part because they provide the arena for shared experiences. Shared experiences are sometimes distinctively and non-reducibly valuable.¹⁶⁰ This means that part of what it is to properly value close personal relationships is to broaden one's own interests. As a participant in a *particular* relationship, I have participant-relative reasons to cultivate *particular* interests—those that I could share with my actual loved ones. But there is a more general reason that applies to me to cultivate wide interests and so increase my range of potential shared experiences. Part of what it is to properly value human relationships *in general* is to take some actions to ensure that one is a good potential relative. To put it another way, part of properly valuing human relationships is to be well prepared to be a participant in relationships.

I do not mean to suggest that we do or should go about acquiring new hobbies and interests with the goal of relationships consciously motivating us. It is not as if I think to myself, 'I think I need an extra friendship in my life, since friendships are so valuable. Perhaps I should take up skiing so that I can be a good friend to a skier, with whom I can enjoy the shared-skiing-experience.' The point I intend to make can perhaps be seen more clearly if we consider a case of someone who is failing to properly value relationships in this particular way. Consider a person who has had the same circle of friends her whole adult life,

¹⁶⁰ The "sometimes" qualifier here is meant to exclude experiences that are simply not valuable, whether shared or not, and experiences that are more valuable if private.

all of whom share her interests. Her relationships with these friends are indeed quite valuable to her and her friends, in all of the ways I described in the previous chapter. But she never forms new close friendships in part because she and her friends have a very limited range of experiences which they all share. It would not seem to be amiss to criticize this person somewhat, for failing to appreciate the full value of the good of sharing that is made possible by relationships. Admittedly, this would not be a very obvious criticism; we might say that she is *narrow-minded* or *parochial*. But it does not seem far-fetched to explain the problem with this kind of narrow-mindedness as being that it closes one off to potential relationships. In contrast, someone who properly appreciates the value of sharing will attempt to be open to new experiences, and will sometimes take action to cultivate new interests, in part for the sake of being able to relate with others in a meaningful way. She will at least take care not to close herself off to potential relationships by limiting her range of experiences.

My claim here may strike some as implausibly strong. Is it really plausible, they may wonder, that the good of sharing experiences really gives me reasons to *engage in* new close personal relationships, rather than merely to respect those of others and value my already existing ones? In particular, given our limited time and emotional resources for close personal relationships, it would seem most reasonable to spend them on already existing relationships.¹⁶¹ In an attempt to allay this worry, let me explain my view more carefully. My view is that the relationship-specific good of shared experiences gives us all reasons to *take some steps toward* being a good potential relative (and so some steps toward engaging in the value of relationships). But it is important to bear in mind here that there are a multitude of

¹⁶¹ J. David Velleman suggests that it is because of our limited emotional resources that we love only some of the people we know. See “Love as a Moral Emotion,” 372.

different sorts of human relationships, with just as many variations in closeness between the participants.

Moreover, unlike some of the other goods I have claimed characterize *close* relationships in particular, shared experiences are a good that does not require a very significant degree of *closeness*. There is value even in the shared-ness of the experience of seeing a protagonist succeed in a cinema full of strangers. This is perhaps a case not so much of a relationship enabling a shared experience (since it would seem strange to say that I have a relationship with the group of strangers in the cinema), but rather of what we might call a *relating*. A relating, I suggest, is a transitory connection with other people in response to some event. A *relationship* has an important temporal dimension, and as such will include many instances of relating.¹⁶²

Here I am moving beyond the realm of close relationships of love and friendship, on which I have hereto been primarily focusing, in order to make a more general point about relating with our fellow human beings. An insightful observation from Robert Nozick is worth taking note of here:

People seek to engage in sharing beyond the domain of personal friendship also. One important reason we read newspapers, I think, is not the importance or intrinsic interest of the news; we rarely take action whose direction depends on what we read there, and if somehow we were shipwrecked for ten years on an isolated island, when we returned we would want a summary of what had happened meanwhile, but we certainly would not choose to peruse the back newspapers of the previous ten years. Rather, we read newspapers because we want to *share* information with our fellows, we want to have a range of

¹⁶² For an insightful analysis of relationships, see Niko Kolodny, "Love as Valuing a Relationships," 135-189.

information in common with them, a common stock of mental contents. We already share with them a geography and a language, and also a common fate in the face of large-scale events. That we also desire to share the daily flow of information shows how very intense our desire to share is.¹⁶³

What Nozick says about reading newspapers here rings true, I think, for a number of human experiences, and possibly all the more so with the present ease of sharing of information. Even if close personal relationships (or new ones) don't seem right for us, the value of sharing experiences with other human beings remains. And I think that the value of this relationship-specific (or relating-specific) good indeed provides us all with reasons to widen the scope of our potential shared experiences to some extent. To the extent, then, that relating with others through shared experiences is generally and universally valuable to human beings, we have reason to broaden our interests so as to make ourselves better potential relatives.

The shared-ness of experiences with a very close friend—someone who seems to know all your values—can be especially valuable for some. And shared experiences that draw on a rich background of other shared experiences may often be more meaningful than isolated, transitory shared experiences. But as I noted above, for some, there may be reasons against this degree of closeness which override the reasons there are in favor of engaging in this sort of (very close) sharing. Fortunately, this is also a good that can be enjoyed without a great degree of closeness, and even to some extent without the context of a relationship, which means that doing so might go some way toward mitigating loneliness. To limit the range of potential shared experiences to those that might be shared with one's current

¹⁶³ Robert Nozick, "Love's Bond," 83-84.

relatives with their current values would be to stifle or limit a valuable human capacity to relate meaningfully with others.

A final point of clarification is in order here. It is not as if the value of relationships gives me, in my capacity as a non-participant, reasons to cultivate or develop any *specific* interests. Whichever interests I choose to cultivate are up to me. Some may be better suited to the value of friendship than others, perhaps, but given the broad range of human interests, there is a lot of room for choice. All the more so if we could be satisfied with rather distant relations of the news-reading sort. The point is that I have some reason to broaden my interests relative to what they are right now; I have reason to try *something* new and somewhat unfamiliar. In this respect, I find the point to be somewhat reminiscent of Kant's positive duties to oneself—we have duties to develop our capacities, but exactly how we do so is up to us (within bounds, of course). The particular *capacity* that I imagine to be under development here is the capacity to relate meaningfully with others, particularly in the sense of sharing experiences.¹⁶⁴

Conclusion

To sum up, I have claimed in this chapter that relationships and the goods specific to them give rise to reasons for us all, and we can consider these reasons as falling into three

¹⁶⁴ Of course, some experiences may be valuable (in part) in virtue of *not* being shared; some experiences are especially valuable because they are *just mine*. That this is the case does not, as far as I can tell, detract at all from the claim that some experiences are particularly valuable (in part) in virtue of their being shared. It may simply mean that we all have some reason to pursue some solitary experiences in addition to pursuing some shared ones. I am grateful to Richard Bett for bringing this point to my attention.

groups. First, we all have reasons to respect existing close personal relationships as deep and basic goods for human beings. This is in virtue of their unique capacity to facilitate character development among imperfect persons—a capacity that I have argued bears impersonal value. Second, I have argued that the relationship-specific good of reciprocity gives us all reasons to take steps to ensure that we are able participants in reciprocal relationships, bearing in mind the broad range of forms such relationships can take. I have construed responding appropriately to these reasons as a kind of good mental hygiene practice, an important form of self-care. Third, I have argued that the good of shared experiences, which is most at home in relationships but can also be enjoyed in any instance of relating with other human beings, gives us all reasons to broaden our experiential horizons. I have claimed that this is likely to make us better potential relatives. The first group of reasons would seem to be agent-neutral and participant-neutral, while the second and third may be described as agent-relative but participant-neutral.

Large and pressing questions remain about the relative importance of the reasons relationships generate when considered alongside other sorts of practical reasons. In particular, there is a worry about how the reasons I describe here may be accommodated along with impartial reasons of morality or justice. I have been drawing here on the *goods* that relationships provide for us as individuals and as agents in general. But relationships are also, of course, sometimes bad for their participants and for non-participants, and for many of the same sorts of reasons (their role in character formation, for example.) Nevertheless, I hope I have shown that the value of relationships is indeed deep, basic, and versatile, and as such generates reasons of respect and reasons to take steps toward engaging in them, for all of us. The challenge of accounting for these reasons in a wider context of practical reasons is the topic of the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

RELATIONSHIPS AND THE BIGGER PICTURE: PARTIALITY AND IMPARTIALITY IN PRACTICAL REASON

Now that I have argued for the value—both personal and impersonal—of relationships, and the reasons—participant-relative and participant-neutral—that they give rise to, the question arises of the importance of these reasons in the bigger picture of practical reason. In particular, we need to think about how relationship-generated reasons measure up to impartial reasons—the reasons of morality. I have shown, I hope, that relationships do play an important role in our lives, and I have explained why. But just how much of a role *should* they play? If the reasons generated by relationships come into conflict with moral reasons, for example, which should take precedence, and why?

As will become clear below, I believe that there is a real potential for conflict between seemingly partial and impartial reasons. As I have been arguing throughout this dissertation, the reasons that arise out of the value of relationships are genuine and significant. Responding to them is part of what it is to properly value a part of human life that is basically and non-reducibly valuable. Nevertheless, I take it that reasons of impartiality are extremely important to an adequate view of practical reason, as they represent values of justice, fairness, and rights that are indispensable to a plausible account of ethical life. That they can come into conflict with some of the reasons I have been arguing for in previous chapters requires careful consideration.

I will suggest in this chapter that there is no apparent resolution to be found for the conflict between the two classes of reasons. I will show how extant attempts to resolve the conflict fail, before suggesting a diagnosis of the problem, and an explanation of its persistence. The conflict is unabating, I suggest, because the features of relationships that make them a deep and basic human good are exactly the same features of them that sometimes lead to a conflict with impartiality. It seems to me that we cannot give either one

of these values up, and so the conflict remains, and will continue to show itself in important moments in our lives. While this may seem to be a disappointing result, in that it fails to provide a clear solution that can be generally implemented, my diagnosis is an illuminating one. It explains why the problem is felt to be persistent (indeed, why it *is* persistent), and does justice to the importance of both partial and impartial concerns.

That there is no general method of resolution for situations in which the reasons conflict is perhaps frustrating, but also, I think, an accurate reflection of the complexity of ethical life. And a deeper understanding of the value underlying reasons of partiality and reasons of impartiality (the former being the subject of this dissertation) will indeed be useful in resolving particular conflicts when they arise. Moreover, though the conflict is persistent, it is not ubiquitous, or inevitable in every case involving both partial and impartial reasons. Relationship-generated reasons are sometimes much more in sync with moral reasons than might be immediately obvious. This point—about the almost moral character of certain relationship-generated reasons—is my starting point for the argument of this chapter.

1. The Moral Flavor of Some Relationship-Generated Reasons

In the previous chapter, I argued that relationships and the goods specific to them give rise to reasons for us all, and we can consider these reasons as falling into three groups. First, we all have reasons to respect existing close personal relationships as deep and basic goods for human beings. The explanation for this first group of reasons lies in the unique capacity of relationships to facilitate character development among imperfect persons. Second, I argued that the relationship-specific good of reciprocity gives us all reasons to take

steps to ensure that we are able participants in reciprocal relationships. I have construed responding appropriately to these reasons as a kind of good mental hygiene practice. Third, I argued that the good of shared experiences, which is most at home in relationships but can also be enjoyed in any instance of relating with other human beings, gives us all reasons to broaden our experiential horizons. I have claimed that this is likely to make us better potential relatives. Now, it seems to me that all three of these groups of reasons that we all have indeed have a rather moral ‘flavor,’ so to speak. Certainly, none of them seems to be deeply at odds with morality, understood as a class of reasons which apply to all for the sake of all.¹⁶⁵ In fact, they seem to be reasons to be morally good, on most understandings of the phrase.

Consider the reasons we have to respect existing relationships as basic human goods. These are reasons that are quite likely to be in harmony with the dictates of a moral system that prescribes respecting people’s rights. Indeed, one way to describe these reasons would be to say that we should respect people’s rights to pursue and maintain their personal projects, including relationships. But this is not a complete description of these reasons on my view. Recall that I have argued that relationships are importantly different from other personal options, projects, or activities. I have claimed that the reasons we have to respect the relationships of others are more significant than the reasons we may have to respect their hobbies, recreational activities, personal tastes, and the like.

This point may be cause for concern. Am I claiming that the weight of reasons is always on the side of existing relationships, such that it is never appropriate to end a

¹⁶⁵ I am purposely stating this as vaguely as possible, while retaining (I hope) some widely accepted content for the term (namely, that it involves a component of impartiality), so as not to have to get in to debates about the nature of morality.

relationship, or advise another to do so? In addition, respecting others' relationships will often mean refraining from interfering in the relationships of others. But what if the relationship in question is an abusive one? Does the abused individual not have claims on us that override the reasons we have to respect (and so not interfere in) the relationship? This line of thought suggests that the value of relationships, and the claim that we have reasons to respect them, are in potentially significant conflict with morality, rather than having a moral 'flavor,' as I am suggesting. However, I think the right way to understand this kind of conflict is to see it as a tension between two *moral* considerations.

It may be tempting here to respond to the worry by pointing out that if the relationship in question is an abusive one, it is not a valuable one of the sort that facilitates positive development of character. However, this line of argument is not open to me, since I have claimed that we have reasons of respect toward existing relationships because they have the *potential* to provide a uniquely apt set of circumstances for positive character development.¹⁶⁶ This means that we have reasons to respect *all* existing close relationships, whether or not they realize the valuable capacity I have pointed to. So the worry about the abusive relationships remains—this looks like a case in which respecting the relationship could indeed be in serious conflict with what morality prescribes. Surely, in such a case, the *right* thing to do is to interfere?

¹⁶⁶ Another way to respond here would be to deny that the abusive relationship has the valuable potential that other relationships may have. Perhaps, given that it is abusive, it does not avail its participants of the opportunities for reciprocal beneficence and character development that I've argued characterizes valuable relationships. On such a view, there would be no reason (of the specific kind under discussion) to respect this relationship. This may be the best description of certain extreme cases, but I do not want to take this line about abusive relationships in general. It is an unfortunate fact that abusive and otherwise unhealthy relationships do bear some value for their participants, and that value may often be (at least in part) of the kind that figures in my argument.

My response to this case may be somewhat disappointing, but I think it is the reasonable one: the reasons we have to respect an existing relationship are not absolute; neither are our reasons to respect the autonomy of individuals. If one individual is torturing another, then we may well have reasons in that case to interfere with the first individual's autonomy. There are times when some consideration calls more strongly for an action that fails to respect the rights of some individual, and there are times when some consideration calls more strongly for an action that interferes with someone else's relationship. That this is true does not mean that there are not generally reasons to respect individual rights, nor does it mean that there are not generally reasons to refrain from interfering in others' relationships. Similarly, there will be cases in which the weight of reasons falls on the side of ending a relationship of one's own. The point to bear in mind is that the reasons to respect relationships are not *in principle* in conflict with the reasons of a moral system. Indeed, given that the reasons ultimately refer to something that is a basic and deeply versatile human good, they would seem to be likely to be in harmony with moral reasons.

Similarly, the second class of reasons I have argued for—reasons to take steps to make ourselves able participants in close relationships characterized by reciprocity—are likely to be in harmony with moral reasons. Taking steps to ensure that we can participate well in reciprocal relationships—developing our listening and communication skills, taking care of our mental health, taking steps to identify counterproductive habits, etc.—is unlikely to be in serious conflict with what morality requires. In fact, it would seem that responding appropriately to these reasons would be to take steps to becoming a better person according to several standards. Taking these steps would be likely to make one a healthier person as well as a happier person, a more likeable person, and indeed a morally better person. In this way, relationships might constitute additional reasons to fulfil duties to oneself, assuming (as

I think is plausible) that there are such duties. In short, responding appropriately to these reasons would be to take steps to develop one's *virtue*. While this is not conceptually identical with acting in accordance with what morality requires, the two are surely not in deep conflict.

The third class of reasons I argued for in the previous chapter is the class of reasons to broaden one's experiential horizons. In fact, I think that widening the range of potential shared experiences that I have developed is another way that relationship-specific goods give people reasons to take care of their characters. To see why, notice that broadening my interests is a step in the direction of developing my *system of values*. Given the account of character I have offered as an expression of a particular person's system of values, one way to understand broadening my interests is as part of a process of developing, or taking care of, my character. And once again, I think that this group of reasons is likely to in fact have a rather moral flavor. Taking steps to broaden one's interests, or range of potential shared experiences, is to take steps to become more *open-minded*. In particular, it is to take steps to be better equipped to appreciate things from other perspectives, and so is a matter of becoming less prejudiced and perhaps even more empathetic. Of course, certain interests may be more conducive to a morally better outlook than others, and some may even be in conflict with morality. (Cultivating an interest in torture or stalking would presumably not be very conducive to becoming a more empathetic person, for example.) But in principle, taking steps to be better equipped to share the perspective of others would seem to be a morally commendable goal.

2. The Conflict Between Impartial Morality and Some Relationship-Generated Reasons

I have been suggesting, so far, that the reasons generated by relationships are of a sort that is quite comfortably compatible with what are likely to be the reasons of morality. In fact, they would seem to often be importantly complementary to morality insofar as they are reasons for positive moral development (as well as positive development by standards other than the moral one.) Indeed, I think this is the case for the reasons that relationships generate for people generally (and so for the reasons treated in the immediately previous chapter—participant-neutral reasons.) But it would be a mistake to overlook the very real possibility of conflict between the *participant-relative* reasons treated in the second chapter and impartial reasons. Recall that in the second chapter, two of the classes of agent-relative reasons I discussed were (1) reasons to favor loved ones in case of need, and (2) reasons to favor loved ones in case of no particular need.¹⁶⁷ Now, if moral reasons are by their nature reasons of *impartiality*—a feature that moral reasons will have on most, if not all, understandings of the term—and relationships give rise to genuine reasons to *favor* our loved ones, there is a genuine potential for conflict here.

The worry is perhaps most familiar from Bernard Williams’s charge of “one thought too many.” Having described an example from Charles Fried in which a person is so situated that he is able to save only one of several people who are drowning, one of whom is his wife, Williams draws attention to the apparent inappropriateness of impartial considerations

¹⁶⁷ The third and fourth classes of reasons addressed there—to increase the range of potential shared experiences and to take care of ourselves—are similar for participants as for non-participants. As such, I do not see them as posing a serious threat of conflict with morality, and will not treat them in detail here.

featuring in the imagined man's deliberation. Though it is no doubt possible for various moral theories to reach the conclusion that it is permissible for the man in this example to save his wife, the point Williams is driving at is that there seems to be something perverse in the mere fact that the question of permissibility arises in deliberation at all. He says:

But this construction provides the agent with one thought too many: it might be hoped by some (for instance, by his wife) that his motivating thought, fully spelled out, would be the thought that it was his wife, not that it was his wife and that in situations of this kind it is permissible to save one's wife.¹⁶⁸

The scenario Williams considers here illustrates the way partial reasons and impartial reasons can conflict in a deep and troubling way. Williams's suggestion would seem to be that bringing an impartial standard to bear on a decision in this kind of case would be to fail to properly value one's wife, or one's relationship with one's wife.¹⁶⁹ His criticism rings true; it requires a response. And it requires a response from me, because two important classes of reasons that I have claimed arise for participants in close relationships are reasons to favor loved ones (i) in cases of need, and (ii) in cases of no particular need.¹⁷⁰ The case described by Williams is a good illustration of (i), while gift-giving is a good illustration of (ii). If relationships generate reasons to favor our loved ones over others, as I have claimed they

¹⁶⁸ Bernard Williams, "Persons, Character, and Morality," 18.

¹⁶⁹ I note here that Williams would presumably consider relationships as similar to other personal attachments or "categorical desires." His larger claim is that morality is self-undermining in that it may require one to give up one's categorical desires, which are necessary if an agent is to care about anything at all, including morality. I will not pursue this argument further here. Instead, I take Williams's criticism to illustrate specifically the importance of partial attachments and how they may conflict with impartial reasons, a significant problem in itself.

¹⁷⁰ See Chapter 2 above.

do, what can we say about cases where these reasons are in serious conflict with considerations of impartiality?

There are several ways of responding to the problem of conflict I've been describing. In the following three sub-sections, I consider, respectively, three ways of responding, and suggest that each fails in its own way. This will lead me back to the problem, and a suggested diagnosis of its recalcitrance. While I think the three approaches to resolving the conflict fail, seeing why they fail will be instructive. The three approaches can be briefly described as follows. One is to provide a defense of non-moral motivations from within a particular moral system. This approach sees acting for the sake of one's relationship with one's spouse (for example) as an instance of acting on a non-moral motive, but explains that morality permits (and perhaps might sometimes even require) acting on non-moral motives in some circumstances. The second approach, too, sees a distinction between moral and non-moral motives and reasons, but places relationship-based motives (or some of them, anyway) within the class of moral motivations. This approach attempts to explain how relationships can be sources of distinctively moral reasons. The third approach is to downplay the importance of morality.¹⁷¹ This approach sees acting for the sake of one's relationship with one's spouse as an instance of a non-moral (and possibly but not necessarily an immoral) action, but makes the case for taking certain non-moral motivations to be more important than moral motivations in at least some circumstances. In other words, this approach maintains the distinction between moral and non-moral reasons, but rejects the claim that moral reasons are always overriding.

¹⁷¹ Of course, one could go the other way, and downplay the importance of relationships. Given the subject of this dissertation, I will not consider this line of thought, but note that it logically can be categorized in this third approach. An example of such a view would be Shelley Kagan's 'extremist' position in *The Limits of Morality*, especially Chapter 1.

2.1. Non-Moral Motives Within a Moral System

The first way of attempting to resolve the conflict is well exemplified by Peter Railton in “Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality,” where he argues, on consequentialist grounds, that morality permits acting for non-moral reasons.¹⁷² Railton describes a “sophisticated consequentialist” who, while having the overall, or perhaps higher-order, goal of maximizing good consequences, is immediately motivated by non-consequentialist concerns. He argues that a good consequentialist agent would often act for the sake of his or her commitments, including relationships in particular.¹⁷³ The idea here is that the best consequences are probably to be brought about if people are motivated by something other than consequentialism most of the time, and so the solution would seem to be to draw a distinction between the motive and the justification of the action. The moral action is *justified* in terms of maximizing the good (or because it issues from a disposition that generally does so), but it is *motivated* by, for example, love.¹⁷⁴ The application to the case Williams describes, then, would be that the man should act out of love for his wife, and should probably do this without thinking about it, because overall, good consequences will be best promoted if people have these sorts of dispositions and commitments. The ultimate

¹⁷² Peter Railton, “Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 13 (1984): 134-171.

¹⁷³ Railton, “Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality,” 151.

¹⁷⁴ See Railton’s example of Juan in “Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality,” 150.

justification for the action, though, is impartial morality—on this view, maximization of the good.

Railton's strategy in particular is a form of indirect consequentialism, but the general strategy of separating the motive of an action from its justification, and making room for non-moral motives within a moral system, is not limited to consequentialism. Another version of this general kind of approach comes from Barbara Herman, a Kantian.¹⁷⁵ As the consequentialist might distinguish the justification of an action from its motive, Herman explicates acting from the motive of duty by distinguishing the *object* of the action from its *motive*.¹⁷⁶ Herman's point in drawing this distinction is to show that, in order to act morally—that is, in accordance with what duty requires—it need not be the case either that the object of one's action is the fulfillment of a duty or that one is never motivated by anything other than duty. The role of duty in motivation is as a “limiting condition”—it ensures that whatever one does on the basis of non-moral motivations is not forbidden.¹⁷⁷ When the man in the example Williams describes chooses to save his wife, the object of the action is to save his wife—that is the answer to the question of what he is trying to do. The motive of his action, on this view, may well be over-determined.¹⁷⁸ That is, it may be that the motive of duty (speaking loosely, the motive to do the right thing) is present as well as a more personal motive (such as one's love for one's spouse). Addressing Williams's example directly, Herman has the following to say: “what the Kantian requires is only that he not view his

¹⁷⁵ See Barbara Herman, “Integrity and Impartiality,” in *The Practice of Moral Judgment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 23-44. See also Herman, “On the Value of Acting from the Motive of Duty,” 1-22 and “Agency, Attachment, and Difference,” 184-207 both in *The Practice of Moral Judgment*.

¹⁷⁶ Herman, “Integrity and Impartiality,” 26.

¹⁷⁷ Herman, “Integrity and Impartiality,” 31.

¹⁷⁸ See Herman, “On the Value of Acting from the Motive of Duty,” 21

desire to save his wife as an *unconditionally* valid reason. This does not stand in the way of the direct expression of attachments in action.”¹⁷⁹ The upshot of Herman's response to the example, I take it, is that the thought about the *permissibility* of saving his wife need not be in the man's mind at the time of action; it presumably functions as a limiting condition in the background.¹⁸⁰

Both Railton's and Herman's proposed solutions to Williams's apparent problem are, I think, interesting and promising in their own ways. They both pay serious attention to the complexity of motivation and justification in ethical life, and in so doing make significant strides in the direction of rendering their respective moral theories recognizable as something that could actually play an important role in most people's lives. Instead of being some kind of impossible, almost saintly, ideal, the good moral agent is rendered more recognizably human by these sorts of account. In Railton's sophisticated consequentialist, we can see human nature expressed in admirable ways through character traits and dispositions that it is fairly natural for us to develop, given the kind of creature we are and the sort of world in which we live. In Herman's agent, we recognize the complex ways in which a variety of considerations populate the ‘deliberative field,’ where it is not always possible to isolate the influence of the motive of duty from motives of attachment, for example.

Though they come from different theoretical backgrounds (consequentialism and Kantianism respectively), Railton and Herman exhibit some similarity in their approaches. One similarity is that they both assume that in acting out of love for his wife, Williams's man

¹⁷⁹ Herman, “Integrity and Impartiality,” 42.

¹⁸⁰ See Herman, “Integrity and Impartiality,” footnote 25 on p. 42: “We do not want to forget that a normal moral agent knows things: he does not have to figure out whether it is permissible to save his wife. He knows it is, and that partly explains why he can act spontaneously, from feeling, and yet according to principle.”

is acting for a non-moral reason. For Railton, to act for a moral reason would be to act for the sake of maximizing the good. For Herman, it would be to act as duty requires in providing morally called-for help.¹⁸¹ Furthermore, for Herman at least (and perhaps for Railton as well, though in his case, the two reasons would presumably not both be operative at the same level), the man could have been acting on the basis of a moral reason *and* on the basis of love for his wife. As I understand them, it need not be the case, for these theories to be true, that the agent is always aware of whether his reason for acting is moral or non-moral, and it is certainly possible for both sorts of reasons to be present simultaneously. This approach, then, allows for interpersonal relationships to play an important role in people's lives, and can construe this role as permissible, and even praiseworthy, but it still sees reasons that arise out of these relationships as being reasons that, in virtue of the fact that they arise out of relationships, lie outside of the domain of morality. This leads me to the second similarity in Railton's and Herman's approaches.

For both Railton and Herman, moral considerations, as opposed to non-moral reasons (of, for example, love or attachment) are ultimately decisive.¹⁸² We see this in Railton's "counterfactual conditional," which he says should be satisfied by a good sophisticated consequentialist.¹⁸³ A sophisticated consequentialist, upon recognizing a serious, deep conflict between a particular commitment and promoting the overall good, would give that commitment up. Similarly, Herman's ideal moral agent must be guided (even

¹⁸¹ See Herman's "dutiful case" in "Integrity and Impartiality," 26.

¹⁸² Susan Wolf groups these approaches together in what she calls the "Standard View," because they share an "unconditional commitment" to morality. (See Susan Wolf, "One Thought Too Many": Love, Morality, and the Ordering of Commitment," in U. Heuer and G. Lang (eds) *Luck, Value and Commitment: Themes from the Ethics of Bernard Williams* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 71-92.) More on Wolf's response below.

¹⁸³ Railton, "Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality," 151.

if only in the background of her motivations) by morality.¹⁸⁴ Morality, recall, should act as a 'limiting condition,' ensuring that none of the agent's other motivations are ruled out. In both accounts, then, if a serious conflict were to arise, impartial morality would have the final say.

Though these accounts go some way towards allaying worries about the conflict between morality and acting for the sake of relationships by showing the demands of morality to be less austere than they may at first seem, they do not ultimately answer the challenge that Williams raises. In effect, they simply push the challenge back a step. These accounts allow the agent to act to save his wife without thinking about whether or not it is permissible in the moment, but they still demand a justification of the action if it is indeed to be acceptable. Morality is assumed to have overriding force. This means that no matter what else may be the case, there is always *most* reason to do what morality requires. It may well be that, as Railton suggests, morality requires that we develop dispositions to act for non-consequentialist reasons, and that this may require that Williams's man saves his wife simply because she is his wife. So far so good. But Williams's concern goes deeper than that. His "one thought too many" charge has as its target the assumed appropriateness of bringing an impartial, rational, moral point of view to bear on matters of this kind *at all*—not only at the time of action.

Similarly, in Herman's case, the moral agent need not be acting for the sake of morality, or from a strictly impartial point of view at the time of action. Morality need not constitute, in the agent, an entirely separate motivation that competes with (and hopefully defeats) other motivations. Rather, various considerations may be relevant, and may be

¹⁸⁴ Herman, "On the Value of Acting from the Motive of Duty," 14.

modified by one another in complex ways, so that motives of love and attachment (for example) are present and operative. However, and this is the important point, Herman's moral agent's interests and motives must be normalized to morality—the end of treating other people as ends *must* have what she calls “regulative priority.”¹⁸⁵ She describes the way morality functions as a regulative principle in her response to Williams’s concern as follows:

[I]n acting from a motive of connection I must also recognize that I am in circumstances in which action is morally required, be willing and able to act even if connection wavers, and act only on the condition that the particular action I am moved to take is permissible.¹⁸⁶

What this means is that, though what there is most reason to do for Herman will often no doubt involve relationships and motives of attachment, what there is most reason to do will *always* be such that it is justifiable by distinctively moral reasons. So, while Williams's man can save his wife without asking himself in that moment whether his maxim satisfies the Categorical Imperative test, his saving his wife *must* be susceptible of an impartial justification if it is to be acceptable. And as I noted above, Williams's challenge goes deeper than simply what is in the mind of the agent at the time of action.

The problem is that insofar as morality constitutes a set of reasons that are of a distinctive kind, impartial and overriding, there is in principle the possibility of a deep and troubling conflict between morality and certain relationships. In essence, what Williams is suggesting is that sometimes, what there is most reason to do *can* be in conflict with morality,

¹⁸⁵ See Herman, “Agency, Attachment, and Difference,” 188. For Herman’s explanation of how non-moral motives would be normalized to morality in the “deliberative field,” see “Agency, Attachment, and Difference” 193-200.

¹⁸⁶ Herman, “Agency, Attachment, and Difference,” 186. Immediately after the quoted sentence, Herman acknowledges the limitations of this sort of response: it may not satisfy objectors who would imbue motives of connection (or attachment) with *moral* value. The persisting worry that I am addressing is not that such a view denies attachment moral value, but rather that moral value may not be supremely regulative.

and his use of this particular example shows that he thinks relationships can be sources of such reasons.¹⁸⁷ It may be that a response like Railton's or Herman's would be satisfactory for cases of conflict between morality and personal commitments and projects in general.¹⁸⁸ If continuing to produce my art comes into conflict with what morality requires of me, allowing morality the final say seems reasonable. But given the account of the value of relationships I have been building, this potential conflict between reasons of love and reasons of morality is more troubling, and allowing morality to always settle the matter is not a satisfactory response. If relationships are as deeply and basically valuable as I have been arguing, the reasons they give rise to are more significant than the reasons generated by many other personal interests and projects.

This means that more needs to be said about these particular reasons of partiality and reasons of impartiality; the general solution of accommodating non-moral commitments in a morally decent life fails to address the particular puzzle about close relationships and reasons of impartiality. Relationships, as bearers of distinctive and basic value for human beings, pose their own, deeper challenge for the impartial perspective of morality. So, it seems that this approach does not provide the resolution we might have hoped for.

¹⁸⁷ In the article being considered, Williams suggests that certain *ground projects* and *categorical desires* may be necessary to ground an agent's interest in anything at all, including morality and life itself. But such ground projects, which include close personal relationships, are at risk of seriously conflicting with morality. Shortly after the example and the remark about 'one thought too many,' Williams says that relationships are at risk of conflicting with impartiality. He then continues:

"They run that risk if they exist at all; yet unless such things exist, there will not be enough substance or conviction in a man's life to compel his allegiance to life itself. Life has to have substance if anything is to have sense, including adherence to the impartial system; but if it has substance, then it cannot grant supreme importance to the impartial system, and that system's hold on it will be, at the limit, insecure." (Williams, "Persons, Character, and Morality," 18.)

¹⁸⁸ I mention this because Williams seems to see relationships as on a par with other personal commitments and projects—they might all constitute what he calls 'categorical desires.' I am suggesting that what works for commitments and projects generally may not work for relationships, because the value of relationships is different.

2.2. Relationships as Bearers of Moral Value

Whereas the approach just considered seems to merely push the conflict back a step, perhaps a more fruitful solution can be found in attempts to bring loving relationships wholly within the realm of the moral. I suggested above that some relationship-generated reasons have a distinctively moral ‘flavor.’ Some have gone further, to construe love or loving relationships as themselves moral phenomena. In this section, I consider two such accounts. The first is J. David Velleman’s account, already partially addressed in an earlier chapter. The second is an African ethical approach that I will refer to as *Ubuntu*.¹⁸⁹

2.2.1. *Velleman’s Account of Love*

Velleman addresses the apparent tension between love and impartial morality by providing an account of love on which love is both selective (partial) and consistent with the impartiality requirement of morality.¹⁹⁰ Though Velleman, like Herman, identifies his view as Kantian, there are some important differences between the two. Whereas Herman’s response to Williams takes it that there is a difference between acting out of love and having a distinctively moral motive, Velleman is instead concerned to bring love within the domain of

¹⁸⁹ *Ubuntu* is the Nguni word used in South Africa for the worldview and ideal that is influential in the approach I consider, but the view I am exploring should be taken to be one that is largely common to many African cultures. More on this later.

¹⁹⁰ Velleman, “Love as a Moral Emotion,” 338-374.

morality. As Velleman says, “love is a moral emotion. So if we find ourselves segregating love and morality in order to keep the peace, then we have already made a mistake.”¹⁹¹ He goes on to argue that the proper analysis of love will construe it as something that has more in common with the attitude of respect than with the Freudian reduction of love to a drive—a view of love which Velleman thinks has been very influential for many philosophers who have written on the subject.¹⁹² In essence, Velleman characterizes love for a person as a rational response to the very same feature of a person that respect for persons is responsive to.¹⁹³ Love is selective (partial) because we can only get to know some persons well enough to feel that we are justified in giving up our emotional defenses against them, but it does not pose a problem for impartial morality because the basis of love is a feature that all persons share.¹⁹⁴

In an earlier chapter, I argued that Velleman’s analysis of love was not entirely accurate. If my arguments there were successful, and Velleman’s account does not accurately capture the phenomenon of love, then he has not successfully shown that the love we care about has a home within morality. But there is a separate problem with Velleman’s attempted resolution that does not depend on my account of the nature of love being correct. This problem is that Velleman’s own account of love in fact leaves relationships wholly unaccounted for. Love is construed as essentially a one-directional attitude that one has toward another person. Velleman himself seems to be aware of this limitation; in relation to Williams’s ‘one thought too many’ case he says:

¹⁹¹ Velleman, “Love as a Moral Emotion,” 341.

¹⁹² Velleman, “Love as a Moral Emotion,” 349.

¹⁹³ Velleman, “Love as a Moral Emotion,” 366.

¹⁹⁴ Velleman, “Love as a Moral Emotion,” 372.

Of course the man in Williams's story should save his wife in preference to strangers. But the reasons why he should save her have nothing essentially to do with love.

The grounds for preference in this case include, to begin with, the mutual dependencies and commitments of a loving relationship... That is, she should invoke their partnership or shared history rather than the value placed on her by his love. Invoking her individual value in the eyes of his love would merely remind him that she was no more worthy of survival than the other potential victims, each of whom can ask "What about me?"¹⁹⁵

The important thing to note about this passage is that whatever the justification is for the man's saving his wife, it is something distinct from the kind of love that Velleman has been explicating in the rest of the paper. So, it is not clear that Velleman has given us an account of love as a moral emotion that can help with the type of problem we had hoped it might. He has shown that it is permissible, even morally valuable, to have this feeling or attitude towards another person, but not that that feeling or attitude can constitute a legitimate reason for action of the relevant preferential kind.

It may be responded at this point that the problem I have just raised is not all that serious, because in the passage just quoted, Velleman has told us what the legitimate reason for acting in this case is—it is the commitment the couple have made to one another. The ultimate justification, this line of thought goes, has something very much in common with the reasons that arise out of promises. But if this is the case, we might well wonder what it is that Velleman's account of love is doing in relation to the problem. Perhaps love, as Velleman construes it, forms the basis of the commitment between the couple—perhaps it is the fact that they love each other in the sense Velleman has laid out that led to their

¹⁹⁵ Velleman, "Love as a Moral Emotion," 373.

commitment in the first place. Perhaps it is, but the important point is that *it need not be*—the basis of the commitment could be something else entirely. Again, the relationship (commitment) and love (a one-directional attitude or emotion) are distinct considerations.

This, it seems to me, leaves something important out. Surely it is a relevant feature of the situation that Williams describes that the man loves his wife (and presumably that she loves him back), even if the commitment on its own is sufficient to justify his saving her. The point is perhaps seen more clearly if we change the example slightly so that it is not the man's wife that he saves, but a close friend to whom he has made no explicit commitment or promise. Surely it would be enough of a justification of the man's saving his friend if he were to say, “she is my *dear friend*.” In fact, Velleman’s account of love cannot be used to resolve the conflict Williams’s case calls to mind, because it intentionally separates ‘love’ from its associated inclinations and emotions, such as attachment and affection.¹⁹⁶ The kind of love that Velleman describes seems too detached from precisely those aspects of love that make a case like Williams’s troubling: we are strongly attached to our loved ones, we are partial to them, and we have a strong inclination to favor them. And these emotions and inclinations are likely to strike us as reasonable. Indeed, failing to favor our loved ones in these ways would seem to be an indication that we are failing to respond appropriately to the fact of our love for them.

So, Velleman’s account does not seem to be able to give us a satisfying solution to the conflict, because it gives up too much of what seems most familiar and important about love. Before abandoning this general type of approach, however, it’s worth examining an

¹⁹⁶ Jeanette Kennett points out this kind of implication of Velleman’s account in “True and Proper Selves: Velleman on Love,” *Ethics* 118 (2008): 213-227. See especially 217-218.

African approach, according to which human relationships are absolutely central to ethics. Whereas Velleman construes love as *a* moral emotion, we might think of *Ubuntu* as construing love as *the* moral emotion. Because the approach is less well-known, and is relatively under-explored in academia, I will give a relatively detailed exposition and discussion of the approach before assessing it as a potential solution to the problem of conflict.

2.2.2. *An African Ethical Approach*

The idea that humanity consists in a valuable sort of relatedness is arguably at the root of much of what is distinctive about sub-Saharan African philosophy. It shows itself in the metaphysics, epistemology, and, of course, in the ethics of the continent. In South Africa, the idea is signified by the Nguni word, *Ubuntu*, but a similar idea is apparent in much of the philosophical literature originating in Africa. While I will often refer to the ethical approach under consideration as *Ubuntu*, the view should be taken as one that will be largely common to many African cultures.¹⁹⁷ *Ubuntu* as a normative account would have it that good actions and practices will be those that are expressive of the human capacity for communal relationships. Since relationships are so central to ethical thought on this view, we might

¹⁹⁷ I borrow Kwame Gyekye's justification for this sort of generalization. In the preface to *Tradition and Modernity*, he says: "In the light of the multiplicity of African cultures and the diversities among them, one need not generalize the details and nuances of an idea or practice worked out within one cultural context for other cultures. Yet what may be true is that in many instances the different cultural forms or practices can be said to be essentially variations on the same theme. There is no denying that contiguous cultures do influence one another; and the cultures of dominant groups have influenced those of smaller groups. This is the reason why a number of scholars recognize the existence of common features or commonalities among the cultures of Africa." Kwame Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience* (Oxford: OUP, 1997), xii.

expect that African ethics can secure a central role for *love*. So, African ethics may have the resources for a more satisfying solution to the apparent conflict between love and morality.

In contrast to familiar western ethical approaches, an African ethical approach will construe human *relations* to be of primary ethical importance. There is a widespread commitment, among various sub-Saharan African cultures, to the value of community. As already noted, one version of the view is signified by the Nguni word *Ubuntu*. *Ubuntu* has no straightforward translation in English, but it signifies a concept of the essence of humanity being in relationships. The idea of *Ubuntu* is conveyed by the oft-quoted ‘a person is a person through other persons’ or ‘I am because we are.’ There is a growing body of philosophical literature interpreting, and applying, this idea as a normative ethical theory which might compete with established consequentialist or deontological theories. According to this kind of theory, the right way to act would be modeled on a certain kind of relationship. While there are many different interpretations of *Ubuntu* and related ethical views, they largely share the central tenet that the value of human relationships is essential to ethics, and indeed, to the concept of humanity itself. Here are some examples of the way this kind of view has been described by various philosophers:

For Black Africa, it is not the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum* (“I think, therefore I am”) but an existential *cognatus sum, ergo sumus* (“I am known, therefore we are”) that is decisive.¹⁹⁸

Unlike Hobbesian subjects, who stand in isolation to define themselves as solitary, unattached thinkers, the human being in African thought defines the self with respect to the quality of his or her participation in a community of similarly constituted selves. Therefore,

¹⁹⁸ Bénédet Bujo, *Foundations of an African Ethic* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001), 4.

personhood is defined in relation to the community. ... A sense of community exists if people are mutually responsive to one another's needs.¹⁹⁹

Ubuntu is the name for the acquired quality of humanity that is the characteristic of a fully developed person and the community with others that results. It thus comprises values, attitudes, feelings, relationships and activities, the full range of expressions of the human spirit.²⁰⁰

African ethics imply that morality is possible only through interaction with others. A person who is utterly alone might be more or less happy but not more or less dutiful. Morality, from a resolutely African perspective, arises only from relationships.²⁰¹

[According to an African ethical theory] an action is wrong insofar as it fails to honor relationships in which people share a way of life and care for one another's quality of life, and especially to the extent that it esteems division and ill will.²⁰²

What all of these characterizations of an African approach to ethics have in common is their emphasis of *community*, and the value of relationships between human beings. The core of an African ethical theory, then, will be the idea that basic moral value is borne by *relationships* of a certain kind, namely, harmonious, communal, or loving relationships.

Rooted as it is in the value of relations between individuals, perhaps *Ubuntu* would capture the importance of attachments like the one Williams calls to mind, and would do so

¹⁹⁹ Nhlanhla Mkhize, "Ubuntu and Harmony: An African Approach to Morality and Ethics" in R. Nicholson (ed) *Persons in Community* (Durban: KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2008), 39.

²⁰⁰ Augustine Shutte, "Ubuntu as the African Ethical Vision," in M. F. Murove (ed) *African Ethics: An Anthology of Comparative and Applied Ethics* (Durban: KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2009), 97.

²⁰¹ Thaddeus Metz, "African Moral Theory and Public Governance: Nepotism, Preferential Hiring, and Other Partiality," in Murove (ed) *African Ethics*, 340.

²⁰² Thaddeus Metz, "Human Dignity, Capital Punishment, and an African Moral Theory: Toward a New Philosophy of Human Rights," *Journal of Human Rights* 9 (2010), 84.

by bringing it squarely within the realm of moral reasons. Thaddeus Metz has done significant work in constructing an explicit, principled moral theory out of the beliefs that constitute the core of a distinctively African ethical theory, and so it will be useful to consider his formulation in particular. The justification from a view like his would be something like the following: Morality requires that we act in such a way as to honor loving or friendly relationships.²⁰³ It goes without saying that it would dishonor our man's loving relationship with his wife if he were to toss a coin in order to decide which person to save. From this perspective, there is only one thing for the man to do: save his wife without a thought, since that is the best way to honor loving relationships. If he stops to deliberate about what to do, perhaps he is morally immature, or has some work to do in cultivating good moral dispositions. But the entire explanation, unlike in the western approaches discussed, lies in the realm of moral reasons. So perhaps an African moral theory like *Ubuntu* can gracefully avoid Williams's charge by assigning basic moral value to loving relationships.

However, it is not clear that *Ubuntu*, so understood, can do justice to the importance of impartial considerations, and one may wonder if it can still be called a moral theory without them. Consider, for example, the role of impartiality in contexts of justice—an important area of life that a moral system should be able to inform. Justice would seem to require some kind of impartiality, and we may wonder whether an African ethical theory can make any sense of impartiality, rooted as it is in relationships. If giving up individual rights to equality before the law, for example, is the cost of adopting an ethical theory that assigns

²⁰³ See Metz, "Toward an African Moral Theory," *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 15:3 (2007), 338: "An action is right just insofar as it promotes shared identity among people grounded on good will; an act is wrong to the extent that it fails to do so and tends to encourage the opposites of division and ill-will." This is Metz's development of the idea that an African ethical theory will require us to prize friendly or loving relationships.

basic moral value to relationships, that is a serious cost indeed. A person without attachments might not be protected by such a moral system, and his interests would not be given much priority in moral deliberation. A related worry is that such a theory would have nothing to say in condemnation of corrupt government officials favoring their family members and political party members—a very serious problem in many African governments.²⁰⁴

There is indeed an interpretation of *Ubuntu* which leads to this unwelcome conclusion, but as I will show, there is a better interpretation of the theory that does not. Properly understood, an African moral theory like *Ubuntu* would in fact protect innocent outsiders, and would in fact condemn the sort of corruption I've just described. It can do this because on this interpretation, it in fact turns out to be an impartialist theory. The key is to reconsider the notion of *relationship* on which moral conduct should be modeled. Recall that Metz characterizes the basically valuable relationship as a friendly or loving one, one that consists in solidarity and goodwill. Let's have a closer look at his evidence for this understanding. Here it is worth quoting Metz at length:

To construe morality as the proper valuing of friendly relationships aptly reflects how many people south of the Sahara think and behave. For example, sub-Saharan Africans often think society should be akin to family. They tend to believe in the importance of greeting strangers. They typically refer to people beyond the nuclear family with titles such as sister and mama. They frequently believe that ritual and tradition have moral significance. They

²⁰⁴ The problem of corruption has been, and continues to be, discussed extensively in African philosophy. There are a variety of positions that are maintained on the topic. Some argue that the notion of corruption has no place in African moral and political theory, while others hold that African ethical approaches do in fact have the resources to condemn corruption. In what follows, I pursue the second line of thought, since it seems to be the more plausible one, and also seems to be the dominant one in contemporary African philosophy.

tend to think there is some obligation to wed and procreate. They usually do not believe that retribution is a proper aim of criminal justice, inclining toward reconciliation. They commonly think there is a strong duty for the rich to aid the poor. And, finally, they often value consensus in decision making, seeking unanimous agreement and not resting content with majority rule.²⁰⁵

Now, Metz at various points in his considerable number of papers on the topic, refers to the kind of relationship that captures these values as loving, friendly, communal, and as resembling that of an extended family. He is also not alone in these characterizations; they are frequent in the African ethical literature, as is shown by the quotes I provided above. It is my contention that running these descriptions together is problematic, and obscures the nature of the value at the basis of African ethical theories like *Ubuntu*.²⁰⁶ In particular, I want to suggest that describing the relationship that serves as the model for relationships exhibiting *Ubuntu* as ‘friendly’ and ‘loving’ is potentially misleading, particularly to readers with a western background. More specifically, the relationships that exhibit *Ubuntu* would seem not to be the sort of close personal relationships that are at issue in cases like the one Williams describes. Here I draw on some excellent analysis of African ethics by Bénézet Bujo in his book *Foundations of an African Ethic*.

Bujo argues that African ethics “unlike Western models of thought, sees relatedness as the decisive issue; it is, however, impossible to categorize this as biological, since relatedness signifies *merely an openness* that goes beyond what is present and what is visible in a

²⁰⁵ Metz, “African Moral Theory and Public Governance,” p. 342.

²⁰⁶ I should note at this point that Metz has some interesting and strong arguments intended to establish that *Ubuntu*, on his understanding, can ground human rights and condemn corruption. The paper just quoted is an excellent example. I will not take issue with these arguments. But, as I suggest below, a clearer statement of the value that is at the basis of a theory like Ubuntu is needed.

given situation.”²⁰⁷ He emphasizes the idea that in African thought, “one becomes a human being only in a fellowship of life with others.”²⁰⁸ Importantly, however, Bujo points out that the relatedness that is the basis of humanity and of human value is not only not restricted to a biological, or familial, relation, it is also not restricted to the boundaries of a community or particular social group: “One who is not a member of my own group is ultimately also the “property of the other,” just as I myself am, and this means that I owe him respect and esteem. Thus one is ultimately related to all human beings.”²⁰⁹ The phrase “the other” here can be understood to refer to God. This is something of a simplification of the metaphysical view that Bujo presents, but I think it is a harmless simplification for the purpose of my argument. The important point is that all human beings are ultimately related through a divine being.

Bujo supplies some examples that clarify the distinctiveness of this kind of view very well. He considers some aspects of sexuality that have historically been taboo in African cultures, and contrasts their rationales with their western counterparts: The first is homosexuality. Without himself condemning same-sex relationships, Bujo notes that they are notably infrequent (or at least do not enjoy public recognition) and are generally denounced in African traditional societies. Where a similar taboo has existed in the west, the rationale has usually been via the concept of ‘natural law.’ In contrast, the African rationale is as follows:

One is a human being only in the duality of man and woman, and this bipolarity generates the triad man-woman-child, which leads to full community. Against this background, a man-

²⁰⁷ Bujo, *Foundations of an African Ethic*, 3. My emphasis.

²⁰⁸ Bujo, *Foundations of an African Ethic*, 5.

²⁰⁹ Bujo, *Foundations of an African Ethic*, 6.

man or woman-woman relationship would not only be looked on as an egotistic isolationism which dares not take the step to full human existence; it also leads to a sexist discrimination against part of the human race and shows an unwillingness to accept the enrichment that comes from heterogeneity.²¹⁰

The second example is the taboo against incest. Once again, the standard western rationale for this taboo (before scientific evidence) has been in the natural law tradition. In contrast, here is Bujo's characterization of the African rationale:

Something similar must be said about the question of incest. The prohibition of incest has deep roots in the concept of community and is thus not to be legitimated (as in the West) on the grounds that incest is contrary to nature. ... The gravity of [the incestuous person's] action consists in the fact that both partners are unwilling to approach others outside their own familial or ethnic group in order to exchange or share their *blood* with them.²¹¹

One final example is important to mention. As we saw in a quote from Metz earlier, there is a widespread conviction in sub-Saharan Africa that there is some duty to get married and produce offspring. Once again, Bujo's explanation is illuminating:

Africans urge against lifelong celibacy along precisely these lines: one who remains unmarried for life withdraws from solidarity with other human persons, offending against the law of life. He is like a magician who ruthlessly destroys life, since a celibate is unwilling to take a share in the growth of life on the biological level and refuses to take his place in the duality of man and woman, which alone constitutes full humanity.²¹²

²¹⁰ Bujo, *Foundations of an African Ethic*, 6.

²¹¹ Bujo, *Foundations of an African Ethic*, 7. Bujo's emphasis.

²¹² Bujo, *Foundations of an African Ethic*, 7.

The point of these examples is not to justify the convictions they explain—as Bujo notes, there is work to be done in questioning whether the foundational values have been correctly interpreted in these cases and others. Rather, the point is simply to highlight the distinctive kinds of arguments that would be offered from an African ethical perspective: these explanations all have to do with a notion of relatedness that is best understood as open, inclusive, and very broad.

It should not be difficult to see how this sort of understanding of relatedness can underscore just practices and institutions, how it can protect outsiders and condemn corruption in government. Unjust practices and institutions will have the effect of closing individuals off to relating as widely and inclusively as possible with others. For individuals to receive unequal treatment before the law would be antithetical to the ideal of openness that Bujo describes. Corrupt government officials, similarly, in favoring those nearest to them would be closing themselves off to wider relations of solidarity.

One may wonder whether this shows that the African approach under discussion actually grounds just institutions, or merely institutions that have many of the same outcomes as just institutions.²¹³ To some extent, this may depend on an analysis of justice. Justice certainly involves some kind of impartiality, and so if the African approach doesn't include impartiality, it presumably doesn't ground just institutions. In fact, however, I think that the notion of relatedness that Bujo describes is precisely a form of impartiality. The difference between it and the impartiality we find in dominant western theories is that the African view does not begin with individuals. Rather, the starting point is the broadest level

²¹³ Thanks to Adrienne Martin for bringing this question to my attention.

of relatedness—the human community.²¹⁴ Furthermore, an individualistic starting point does not seem to be essential to justice, as long as rights for individuals are somehow secured. So, it seems we do have here a kind of impartiality that can ground just practices and institutions, which is rooted in the concept of valuable relatedness, rather than in the concept of valuable individuals.

But let us return to the idea with which we began: strong partial attachments of the kind we typically have to romantic partners and close friends. It looks like we can have an African moral theory that gives us what we want in terms of impartiality, but can it still give Williams what he wants in terms of partiality? As it turns out, I don't think it can. This is because the kind of relationship that is basically valuable in this kind of theory is very different from the kind of relationship Williams's charge calls to mind. The attachments we have to our partners and friends have certain distinctive features that attachments to family, for example, may not have. These relationships are in a sense *exclusive*, *selective*, or *discriminatory*. The sort of attachment to which Williams alludes is one that is deeply rooted in individualism. These relationships are typically chosen, or entered into voluntarily by individuals, in part on the basis of features of other individuals that are seen as distinctive, and special. It is crucial to relationships of this kind that we *favor* our loved ones over others; this is precisely why Williams thinks even considering the reasons one might have to save the stranger would be 'one thought too many.' The idea is that to bring considerations of impartiality to bear on cases like this betrays an inappropriate attitude to close relationships; it is to fail to value close relationships as one should. The point is that the value of these relationships lies wholly outside whatever reasons make up an impartial system. Insofar as an

²¹⁴ It may be that there is a still broader level of relatedness that includes non-humans as well. For the sake of simplicity, I am focusing here only on interpersonal ethics.

African moral theory can satisfy the impartiality requirement, it seems it might face the same problem as its western counterparts regarding close partial attachments of the sort Williams has in mind. The sort of relationship that lies at the foundation of an African moral theory is not selective in the way modern western friendships and love relationships are.

It is not my claim that these sorts of relationships do not exist in non-western societies; rather, my point is that this sort of relationship is very far from being the ideal that does foundational work in African ethics. To see that this is the case, consider some remarks from Bujo on the ideals of marriage and sexuality in African ethical life:

While Western marriage is primarily something brought about by a contract between two persons, African marriage is understood as a covenant between two families, each embracing a community of several generations.²¹⁵

The African understanding of marriage questions the Western understanding, where marriage [is] lived individualistically and considered as nothing more than a private contract between two persons, without consideration for the community....²¹⁶

African communities are interested in the sexual lives of all their members, since sexuality is not a private matter. The goal of sexuality is to keep together the community entrusted to us by our ancestors and to bestow ever new life on this community.²¹⁷

We can see here that even marriage and sexuality are understood in a much more *open*, broadly inclusive, and almost public way in African ethics than in the western liberal tradition. Recall again the rationale for the taboo on same-sex relationships and incest

²¹⁵ Bujo, *Foundations of an African Ethic*, 18-19.

²¹⁶ Bujo, *Foundations of an African Ethic*, 36.

²¹⁷ Bujo, *Foundations of an African Ethic*, 37.

articulated by Bujo: in both cases, the primary reason against these expressions of sexuality are that they supposedly represent a withdrawing from community—closing oneself and one’s partner off from wider relatedness. Now notice that it is precisely these features of close personal relationships prized in western societies that characterize romantic relationships and close friendships. Robert Nozick, for example, describes a romantic relationship as two individual spheres partially overlapping one another—a clear image of two people partially open to one another but quite separate from the rest of the world.²¹⁸ Such a relationship would not be very highly esteemed from an African ethical perspective.

It would seem that the African view I’ve been describing would reverse the order of accounts of normativity that begin with the individual and move outwards, such as the cosmopolitanism of the Stoics, and C.D. Broad’s “self-referential altruism.” According to this sort of view, one has special obligations to various others depending on their relation to oneself, with the closer circles being the most important. In contrast, the view suggested by Bujo’s analysis is one where normativity comes from social relatedness, but the broadest circle of relatedness is the ethically primary one.²¹⁹ A further difference between the African account and that of the Stoics, for example, is in the latter’s emphasis on reason as a basis for world citizenship. The view Bujo suggests is seemingly less interested in universal reason

²¹⁸ See Nozick, “Love’s Bond,” 68-86.

²¹⁹ I note that there may be very little difference between the African approach and ancient cosmopolitan theories in terms of normative implications, since the ideal in the latter is to bring the broader circles closer. In both cases, inclusivity would seem to be recommended. Thanks to Richard Bett for pointing this out to me. There is still an interesting difference between the approaches, however, in terms of explanation, or starting points. The African approach seems to proceed from an ideal of very broad relatedness, while the ancient cosmopolitan approach seems to proceed from an ideal of close connections between individuals. For my comments about Stoic cosmopolitanism here, I am relying largely on Tad Brennan’s discussion of *oikeiôsis* in his *The Stoic Life: Emotions, Duties, and Fate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 154-168.

than with a shared, or common, good for community members.²²⁰ In other words, according to a distinctively African view, the *human* community, and the common good for its members, is more important than one's immediate community, such as one's village, family, or culture.

So, where does this leave us? I have argued that the kind of relationship at the foundation of these theories is a very broad and open one—it is a communal relationship potentially between all human beings. It is inclusive and non-discriminatory. One implication is that, like western impartialist theories, African ethical theories are likely to protect innocent outsiders and condemn corruption, though for quite different reasons. Another implication is that, like western impartialist theories, African ethical theories are liable to be in conflict with close partial attachments of the sort that we prize in our personal lives in the west (at least). Again, though, the explanations will be different in the two cases.

So we have seen that two strategies for dealing with the conflict between partial and impartial reasons do not work. Justifying non-moral motives within a moral system would not sufficiently account for the importance of relationships in our lives, and construing partial reasons as themselves moral reasons only works if we give up much of what we care about in close personal relationships. There remains the less conciliatory strategy of downplaying the importance of morality in our lives. I turn to consider this strategy in the following section.

²²⁰ The Stoics may not see much of a distinction here, but many African philosophers would, as they downplay the importance of universal reason in comparison with most western philosophical traditions.

2.3. Downplaying the Importance of Morality

Susan Wolf suggests an interpretation of Williams's point according to which the “one thought too many” is a problem with a considerably wider scope than it is often taken to be. She describes various responses to the point (including Railton's and Herman's) as variations of the “Standard View,” according to which the apparent problem that Williams is pointing out has merely to do with the thoughts that might be present in the man's mind at the time of deliberation and action.²²¹ Proponents of the Standard View then deal with the problem by explaining that an agent need not be thinking about morality at the time of action in order to be acting morally. Wolf disagrees with this interpretation; according to her (and, she thinks, Williams), the thought about moral permissibility might be one too many not only when it occurs at the time of action, but also if it occurs to an agent *counterfactually* in certain situations.²²²

Specifically, Wolf claims that she is troubled by the idea of a man who might ask himself hypothetically or counterfactually what he should do in such a case as a way of preparing himself to do the (morally) right thing if such a situation or one like it should occur.²²³ This imagined man is troubling to Wolf because he seems to be *too* committed to doing the right thing—she describes his attitude as seeming to her to be somewhat obsessive.²²⁴ On Wolf's interpretation, the “one thought too many” charge has as its target what seems to be an excessive concern with morality, and this concern does not show itself

²²¹ Wolf, “Love, Morality, and the Ordering of Commitment,” 74-75.

²²² Wolf, “Love, Morality, and the Ordering of Commitment,” 77.

²²³ Wolf, “Love, Morality, and the Ordering of Commitment,” 77.

²²⁴ Wolf, “Love, Morality, and the Ordering of Commitment,” 77.

at the moment of action (at least, it need not), but in calm, reflective moments when the agent is free to consider what, all things considered, would be the best thing to do. In Wolf's words, the passage from Williams "should lead us to question the model of moral agency that would require unconditional *commitment* to acting within the bounds of what morality permits."²²⁵ Wolf thinks that it is unreasonable to expect people to be unconditionally committed to morality (or to anything else, for that matter).²²⁶

The friend of impartial and overriding morality may respond at this point by admitting the possibility of conflict, and stating that in such cases, the commitment to morality *should* win out. The accounts given by Railton and Herman have shown, the response will say, that the cases in which morality conflicts with our personal commitments to one another are more rare and less of a cause for concern than it might have at first seemed, and so allowing morality to be the decider in truly difficult cases should not be such a great cause for concern. Indeed, it might come as a kind of relief to know that there is a decider in truly difficult cases. But still, Wolf and Williams will want to say, there *is* something troubling about giving morality this role, and they do indeed seem to be on to something. It will be useful here to look more carefully at what the point Wolf is making about the hypothetical scenario tester is.

The hypothetical scenario tester who runs through various counterfactual situations in order to draw conclusions about the boundaries of the realm of morally permissible actions is described by Wolf as putting her off. She does not intend to claim that the hypothetical scenario tester is doing something *wrong*; certainly, he would not seem to be

²²⁵ Wolf, "Love, Morality, and the Ordering of Commitment," 75.

²²⁶ Wolf, "Love, Morality, and the Ordering of Commitment," 87-88.

doing anything *morally* wrong. But, as Wolf puts it, “there is nothing especially right about him either.”²²⁷ Rather, her point is that it is too strong a claim to say that having this level of commitment to morality is the only acceptable ideal. She gestures toward a different ideal—an agent who would have impartial morality as one among several important commitments in his or her life but who would not be unconditionally committed to anything, morality included. The claim is that giving morality an all-important status as the final decider in difficult cases is not the only legitimate ideal, and there is the suggestion if not the explicit claim that giving it this role may in fact be *unreasonable*.²²⁸ So, the conclusion would seem to be that there is something wrong with the idea of morality as an always overriding set of reasons. Impartial morality may be important (indeed, for Wolf, it is important), but it does not have the absolutely authoritative status that it is often taken to have.²²⁹

At this point, we face a problem. The problem is what sense to make of the idea of distinctively moral reasons if they are not absolutely authoritative and always overriding as Wolf suggests. What is the category of the moral, if not the category of absolutely binding reasons or all-things-considered most important reasons?²³⁰ Without a special authoritative status, can reasons properly be referred to as moral? If they are one set of concerns among

²²⁷ Wolf, “Love, Morality, and the Ordering of Commitment,” 91.

²²⁸ See especially Wolf, “Love, Morality, and the Ordering of Commitment,” 88.

²²⁹ Though he too rejects the idea that morality is always overriding, Samuel Scheffler criticizes the sort of argument Wolf gives as “inconclusive” insofar as it depends on the assumption that morality is *stringent*, or very demanding—an assumption he also rejects. Without getting into the details of the complex account Scheffler gives of the relation between human nature and morality, I note that I take Wolf’s argument seriously because it is plausible that there could be *some* cases of genuine conflict between the reasons of relationships and the reasons of morality, insofar as the former are clearly partial and the latter are clearly impartial. I am more concerned with this, narrower conflict than with a broader conflict between a fully worked out conception of morality and human concerns in general. (See Scheffler, *Human Morality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 56-59.)

²³⁰ Scheffler notes that Wolf (and Williams) tend to conflate overridingness with stringency and pervasiveness in *Human Morality*, 56, fn. 5. It does certainly seem to be the case that Wolf rejects the claim that morality is overriding as well as the claim that it is pervasive (she thinks there are areas of life, or particular decisions, on which it should not be brought to bear.)

others, with which they can compete (and not always successfully), we need an account of how it is that they constitute a separate class of reasons. I return to this problem in more detail below, but for now it is worth pointing out that this point is not lost on Wolf. As she says:

[T]he further one goes in specifying one's conception of morality in such a way as to assure that one's questions about what is morally permissible have determinate answers, the more difficult it becomes to defend the view that morality has supreme authority. If we define morality in a certain way, in other words, we might know what morality requires us to do, but we shall not know whether to give morality precedence over other important values, such as love.²³¹

Despite these remarks which acknowledge the difficulty of making sense of the category of distinctively moral reasons, Wolf does seem to think that there is a meaningful distinction between moral and non-moral reasons insofar as she argues that moral reasons do not have the absolutely overriding status that they are sometimes taken to have. That is, though her response differs decidedly from those that she groups together as the Standard View, her response seems to share with them the recognition of a distinction between moral and non-moral reasons, and like the Standard View, she places reasons that arise out of relationships in the latter category.

Wolf does not clearly state her view of the content of morality in the chapter being considered, but she does seem to assume that the category of the moral is a category of reasons that are grounded in an impartial perspective.²³² Though she does make a few

²³¹ Wolf, "Love, Morality, and the Ordering of Commitment," 82. See also footnote 15 on the same page: "Indeed, the tension arises as long as questions of moral permissibility are understood to have determinate *content*, different from whatever it is, all things considered, most rational to do."

²³² See, for example, "Love, Morality, and the Ordering of Commitment," 74, 87.

remarks that suggest she may be more inclined to accept a view of morality that identifies values such as love as themselves moral values,²³³ she also expresses doubts about the ability of the latter view to serve as a guide to action.²³⁴ And action-guidingness is a function she seems to want to preserve for morality:

If morality is to be of any use as a guide to live by and a guide by which to judge, advise, and apply pressure to others, then it must consist of relatively substantive rules and principles that can be knowable *in advance* of the particular situations in which the question of moral permission is raised. ... I have been arguing in this chapter that at least one reasonable and attractive kind of person, having one reasonable and attractive kind of love, will not commit herself unconditionally to constraining her behavior to what morality, so conceived, permits.²³⁵

Though she criticizes the ideal of an agent who is unconditionally committed to morality, her own preferred ideal does include a commitment to morality—just not an unconditional one.²³⁶ She says nothing more to spell out how this could all work together, and without more detail, I have doubts about its coherence. One remaining strategy to consider is to reject the assumption of a sharp distinction between moral and non-moral reasons. I briefly consider this strategy, and suggest its promise, below.

²³³ See, for example, Wolf, “Love, Morality, and the Ordering of Commitment,” 86, 89.

²³⁴ Wolf, “Love, Morality, and the Ordering of Commitment,” 89.

²³⁵ Wolf, “Love, Morality, and the Ordering of Commitment,” 89.

²³⁶ Wolf, “Love, Morality, and the Ordering of Commitment,” 92.

3. The Difficulty of Separating Impartial and Partial Reasons

While all of the strategies pursued thus far seem unable to resolve the conflict between the reasons of relationships and the reasons of impartial morality, there may be a way out of the trouble if we give up the assumption that there are two distinct classes of reasons at issue. If there is no deep distinction between the reasons of relationships and the reasons of impartial morality, then the conception of conflict between them may rest on a mistake. If this is the case, the ‘conflict’ may show itself just as much in practical life—there will still be cases where difficult decisions need to be made between acting for the sake of one’s close relationships and acting for the sake of (for example) humanity in general—but the difficulty will be no different from other practical dilemmas, from a theoretical perspective. This will mean that any attempt to find a principled way of resolving these conflicts would be wrongheaded, and could explain the lack of a successful resolution thus far.

Joseph Raz has argued against the idea that there is a deep distinction between the moral and the non-moral.²³⁷ Specifically, he offers reasons to think that there is no deep difference in kind between moral and non-moral reasons. As one consideration against the distinction, Raz argues that attempts to account for the supposed special stringency of moral as opposed to non-moral reasons do not work:

The question is whether moral considerations must be a special class, for otherwise one cannot explain their stringency. The answer is that they are not specially stringent, for

²³⁷ Joseph Raz, “On the Moral Point of View,” in *Engaging Reason: On the Theory of Value and Action* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 247-272.

example, some of them are supererogatory. To say that moral *duties* override non-moral considerations does not help support the suggestion that morality as a whole constitutes a special point of view.²³⁸

Similarly, in “The Amoralist,” Raz argues that it is impossible to coherently draw a sharp distinction between two views that people may hold: he calls these people the moralist and the amoralist.²³⁹ The difference between these two characters is that the former believes that persons are valuable in themselves, while the latter denies this.²⁴⁰ Interestingly, in this paper, Raz uses the example of friendship, which as we have seen is most often taken to be a non-moral good, to argue that there is no real distinction between the moralist and the amoralist. He does this by suggesting that we consider an amoralist who lives a full and rewarding life, and as part of this full life, values friendship.²⁴¹ What becomes apparent, when we consider this kind of amoralist, is that actual friendship of the kind that forms part of a rich, full, and rewarding life presupposes acceptance of the moralist's principle—that persons have value in themselves.²⁴² Ultimately, Raz's point is that his imagined characters—the moralist and the amoralist—are in fact impossible fictions, because there is no real distinction between morality and all other practical matters.²⁴³

It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to fully answer the question of whether there is a meaningful category of moral reasons that is deeply different from non-moral reasons. But Raz's arguments provide a clue, I think, to a structural feature of the reasons of

²³⁸ Raz, “On the Moral Point of View,” 269.

²³⁹ Raz, “The Amoralist,” in *Engaging Reason*, 273-302.

²⁴⁰ Raz, “The Amoralist,” 274.

²⁴¹ Raz, “The Amoralist,” 283-284.

²⁴² Raz, “The Amoralist,” 288.

²⁴³ Raz, “The Amoralist,” 302.

relationships that can at least help to explain the apparent tension they give rise to. Going forward, I will assume that there often are important considerations of impartiality, while not committing to the claim that they constitute a distinct class of reasons. These impartial considerations will sometimes be more important than more partial considerations, but they may also sometimes be less important. In other words, I am considering the possibility of practical conflict to be a real and significant one, without taking a stance on the theoretical depth of the conflict. But the arguments of this dissertation provide some enlightening insight into the nature of these practical conflicts, and the sense we have that a principled resolution is troublingly elusive.

If my arguments throughout this dissertation have been successful, they show that close personal relationships give rise to genuine, important reasons and they are deeply, basically, and in part impersonally valuable as they constitute basic, versatile goods for human beings. Some of the reasons such relationships give rise to (especially reasons to favor one's relatives over others) would seem to be in conflict with reasons of impartiality. But, as I see it, it is impossible to divorce those reasons from the deep and basic value of close personal relationships, which explains the more morally flavored reasons that arise out of relationships. That is, it would be impossible to retain the impersonal value of relationships, and respond to the more morally flavored reasons they generate, while downplaying the personal value of relationships, and not responding to the strongly partial reasons they generate. This is because the impersonal value, and thus the morally flavored reasons, depends on the personal value of relationships, which in turn is inseparable from their strongly partial reasons. The impersonal value of relationships is dependent on their personal value so that the morally flavored reasons do not operate unless the more strongly partial reasons do.

As an illustration, we might consider the class of reasons to take care of one's capacity for reciprocity—one of the classes of reasons that I've suggested is in harmony with morality. Most immediately, the value that supports these reasons is impersonal—it is the value of the relationship-specific good of reciprocity that provides a unique and important arena for character development. But recall that, ultimately, the explanation for why this kind of reciprocity is especially valuable refers to aspects of relationships that are clearly personally valuable. It is because of our intimate acquaintance with, and affection for, our close relatives that relationships with them avail us of this good. It is because I love my friends that the stakes of my interactions with them are especially high, and it is because I trust them that I have room to explore other-directed actions and dispositions. It is because these particular relationships have such significant personal value to me that they provide the distinctive opportunity for me to practically explore my values—most especially those values that have implications for how I treat other people. So, our reasons to take special care of our capacities for reciprocity ultimately have their source and explanation in personal value, which gives rise to strongly partial reasons.

To sum up, the reasons of relationships that I have described as having a rather moral flavor—reasons to respect existing relationships as basic human goods, reasons to take care of our capacities for reciprocity, and reasons to become somewhat more open-minded—derive from the following features of relationships. Close relationships are basically valuable because of their versatile capacity to foster an important kind of character development. Specifically, relationships respond to our imperfections and vulnerabilities in a unique way—they allow us to better understand, to develop, and to practice our commitments to values. They are able to do this because our close relatives are uniquely well positioned in relation to our value systems—they are intimately acquainted with them, but

they do not fully share them, meaning that our close relatives occupy what I have called a doubly privileged perspective in relation to our value systems. Furthermore, and crucially, the fact that we have strong affection for our loved ones makes it more likely that we will *care* about their perspectives on our value systems. It is the combination of this doubly privileged perspective and the motivational force provided by the fact of our affection for our relatives that enables them to play the versatile, basically valuable role they do in our character development. And it is this role—the role of an impersonally valuable, basic human good—that explains the moral ‘flavor’ of the reasons we have to respect relationships, to take care of our relational capacities, and to broaden our experiential horizons.

Note that the dependence as I’ve described it is one-directional. The personal value of my relationships and the reasons they generate for me simply as a participant in them need not depend on any corresponding impersonal value or participant-neutral reasons. My relationships can be good for me just in case they contribute to a pleasant and fulfilling life for me. Insofar as they are genuinely, personally valuable, however, they generate reasons for me to favor my loved ones over others; this is part of what it is to respond to their value. And this is perhaps where the explanation for the recalcitrance of the tension between partiality and impartiality lies: the personal value of relationships *can* eventually ground significant participant-neutral reasons that are in harmony with morality, but they need not. Relationships have the potential (a significant and interesting one) to be good for morality, but they need not be good for morality to be good for individuals. In contrast, their goodness for individuals is essential if they are to have any practical import in our lives.

The apparent priority of strongly partial reasons in the foregoing discussion should not be too concerning if we resist the assumption that partial and impartial reasons are deeply different in kind. That assumption may lead us to imagine that relationships pull us in two different directions, but more strongly toward our loved ones. Rather, if we reject the sharp dichotomy between partiality and impartiality, we can see that relationships are bearers of value for human beings, and as such, they generate practical reasons that are complex and varied. A particular friendship may urge me to favor my friend over a group of strangers, but the value of my relationships in general urges me to develop my capacity for reciprocity by taking steps to be more open-minded. In particular cases, it may be that the latter reason cancels out the former. In other cases, the converse may be true. It is also important to remember that the reasons of relationships do not operate in isolation. Though I have argued for a rather modest role for relationship-generated reasons in relation to impartiality, there are also independent considerations of impartiality that operate together with relationship-generated reasons. One plausible example, as Raz has argued, is that properly appreciating and participating in friendship presumably requires a commitment to the idea that human beings are valuable in themselves.²⁴⁴

I do not mean to deny that relationships and their strongly partial reasons can and do threaten morality in particular cases. The motivational force provided by our love and affection for our relatives makes this a real concern. But I am suggesting that the problem does not run as deep as it may seem, precisely because it is mistaken to think of partiality and impartiality as two distinct forces that are essentially opposed. As I've been trying to show, when the full value of relationships is most fully appreciated, it reveals reasons that are

²⁴⁴ See Raz, "The Amoralist," 273-302.

strongly connected to both partial and impartial concerns. My relationships give me reasons to favor my loved ones, but they also give me reasons to take care of my capacity for reciprocity, which effectively makes me a better person—better in my treatment of human beings in general. And they awaken me to much of value that would otherwise not have affected me much. These are, I think, essential aspects of living a good human life, including specifically the moral dimension of such a life. That particular relationships lead particular participants to make morally problematic decisions is cause for concern, certainly, but it is cause for concern about particular relationships and their effect on us rather than for concern about the value of relationships in general.

One may wonder if I have been too quick to tie the personal value of relationships to the reasons that pose a potential problem for acting morally. Perhaps we can in fact recognize and appreciate the personal value of relationships without acting on the potentially troubling reasons. I can appreciate and indeed cherish my relationship with Joe as something very deeply important to me, while acting only on reasons that I believe to be consistent with the requirements of morality, on this sort of view.²⁴⁵ This strategy will not work, however, as long as one thinks (as I do) that part of what it is to properly value something is to respond to it as reason-giving. This surely means that to not be prepared to act on reasons of partiality generated by relationships is to some extent to fail to properly appreciate their value.²⁴⁶ It would simply not be true to say that I would value Joe as I in fact do if I were not

²⁴⁵ Depending on the details when fully spelled out, such a view might amount to something like Railton's, Herman's, or Velleman's view. Indeed, I suspect something like this strategy lies behind Velleman's separation of love as an attitude (appreciation of rational nature) from the various motives he says that it 'unleashes.' Velleman seems to be of the view that there are reasons *for* love, but that love itself is not a reason (unless it is a reason only to drop our emotional defenses.) Though I have addressed these sorts of views above, I think it is worth briefly addressing here again, specifically in 'value' and 'reason' terms.

²⁴⁶ In this, I am in agreement with Scheffler, among others.

disposed to favor him over others in cases of need (such as in lifeboat scenarios) and in cases of no particular need (such as in contexts of gift-giving and other cases of optional beneficence.) Moreover, if I were not so disposed, criticism of me—in particular, of my attitude toward Joe and our relationship—would be appropriate. Such criticism would not be of the moral variety, of course, but it would nevertheless be appropriate and warranted.

In the end, my position turns out to share much with Susan Wolf's, except that I do not share her assumption that the conflict is one between deeply different kinds of reasons. I share Wolf's resistance to the idea that we should have any absolutely *unconditional* commitments, and her view of ethical life as something that cannot be figured out in advance (and nor should we attempt to do so.) But whereas her view becomes puzzling in its details—specifically, the details of what the category of the moral might be if not overriding or especially authoritative—I suggest that it is best to talk about the conflicts without invoking deeply different categories of reasons. The labels 'partial' and 'impartial' are useful in that they identify tendencies, but I think it is counterproductive to read much more into the terms than that. Some evidence that the difference is not extremely deep is that (strongly partial) relationships can give rise to independent reasons to make ourselves morally better by urging us to be more open minded and empathetic, for example. Similarly, as Raz has argued, the (impartial) moral belief that persons have value in themselves can enrich friendship.

Conclusion

So, where does this leave us? Is there something general and enlightening to be said about relationship-generated reasons of partiality and impartial reasons on the basis of the foregoing arguments? Well, perhaps it is just this: we cannot legitimately ignore either, even if they conflict (as they sometimes will.) As Raz has argued that an ‘amoralist’s’ position would be incoherent without a commitment to the ‘moralist’s’ position, I have suggested that the value of relationships is such that it recommends partiality but also very likely serves impartial concerns. This is less puzzling, I think, if we give up the view of the two concerns as deeply distinct and opposed. When some particular reason of partiality conflicts with some particular reason of impartiality, a judgment will have to be made about which of them is more pressing. My position on the matter, as well as my attitude toward my position is very similar to Scheffler’s on the closely related but broader issue of the relation between morality and personal interests generally:

As I have indicated, [mine] is a view that stands intermediate between two more extreme positions: between the view that morality and self-interest ultimately coincide, and the view that they are diametrically opposed. The very structure of an intermediate position can make it difficult to defend. For since such a position compromises between two extremes, it in effect concedes some merit to each, thereby undermining its ability to employ certain of the arguments that the extremes use against each other. And since it commits itself fully to neither extreme, it in effect concedes some weakness in each, thereby undermining its ability to employ certain of the arguments that the extreme positions rely on for support. At worst an intermediate position may seem vulnerable to a charge of inconsistency or theoretical instability. At best it may seem incapable either of defending itself or of criticizing the

extreme alternatives with anything like the kind of force and conviction that each of them can muster. On the other hand, intermediate positions sometimes have the most important virtue of all—the virtue of being correct.²⁴⁷

Ethical life is complicated and difficult, and admits of few hard and fast distinctions and unambiguous principles. I believe this is because human beings are complex, imperfect, and vulnerable. A true account of practical reasons must be sensitive to these facts of human nature. But it would certainly be disappointing if there were no more to say about partiality and impartiality than this.

Fortunately, I think there is more to say, and I have tried to say some of it in this dissertation. While there may be no clear, general, and principled solution to the conflict between partial and impartial reasons, by better understanding the content and explanations of various ‘partial’ and ‘impartial’ reasons, we can better understand particular situations in which the conflict shows itself. And we can be better prepared to make the difficult decisions. By understanding why close relationships give rise to reasons to favor loved ones, and by understanding that those reasons are importantly connected with certain impersonal values and, indeed, basic human goods, we can approach difficult dilemmas with a more nuanced appreciation for what is actually at stake. With this understanding in hand, we can respond to the reasons generated, which will include taking good care of ourselves in particular ways that may indeed help us better understand the value to which we are responding. Of course, a more complete preparation would also involve a deep understanding of the reasons that seem more clearly to concern impartiality—something I have not taken up in the present work, though something that has been and continues to be

²⁴⁷ Scheffler, *Human Morality*, 4-5.

explored extensively in philosophy. But I think some significant progress has been made here in understanding the value of close personal relationships and the reasons to which they give rise. This is one component, I believe, of navigating the dense and complicated reality of ethical life, in an effort to live a good life for a human being.

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Curriculum Vitae

Sandy Koullas (formerly Sandy Koll) was born on November 9, 1982 in Welkom, South Africa. She received her BA with majors in philosophy and psychology from the University of the Witwatersrand (WITS) in 2006. She earned her BA Hons degree in philosophy (with distinction) from WITS in 2007, and her MA degree in philosophy (with distinction) from WITS in 2008. From 2008 to 2009, she taught several classes at WITS, including a course on Philosophy and Human Rights as part of the International Human Rights Exchange Program. In 2009, she enrolled at the Johns Hopkins University to pursue her PhD in philosophy. While working toward her PhD, she taught several classes, including an original survey course on African Philosophy for which she was awarded a Dean's Teaching Fellowship and offered a Dean's Prize Fellowship twice. She served as a graduate advisor to *Prometheus*, the undergraduate philosophy journal and club, for three years, and worked as a tutor at the Writing Center for four years, where she received the Outstanding Shift Director award for the 2014-2015 academic year. Throughout her academic career, she has participated in several conferences as a presenter and commentator. Her graduate work was supported by an Owen Scholars Fellowship from 2009 to 2012, and a David Sachs Fellowship in the spring semester of 2015.